**Reading/writing gaps and connections identified in postgraduates in an EFL context**

**Institutional Description**

UNAM is the largest and most important public university in Mexico with 366,930 students enrolled until September 2021. 30,792 students are enrolled in postgraduate studies across its multiple national faculties, multidisciplinary units, institutes, and research centers (UNAM Portal de Estadísticas, 2021). UNAM major activities involve research and generation of knowledge in science, technology, and humanities (Rojo, Seco, Martínez, & Malo, 1994). Most students are Mexicans with Spanish as an official language and who might speak fluent English thanks to the vicinity with the United States, private education, and migration (Villagran Mora, 2020, p. 10). Students learn to write mostly in Spanish and although English is part of the curriculum, the lack of sufficient time for instruction and exposure to the language causes students to be insufficiently fluent (Villagran Mora, 2020, p. 10) and to struggle when writing academic English (Anderson & Cuesta-Medina, 2019; Hanauer & Englander, 2011) needed for research publication purposes at postgraduate degrees. The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and General Direction of Cooperation and Internationalization (DGECI) agree that the dissemination of research written in English plays a crucial role in academic contribution and the internationalization of UNAM (DGECI, 2018, https://www.unaminternacional.unam.mx/es/alumno/posgrado/colaboracion-cgep). English is the lingua franca used in science, so academic research is generally done thinking of an English-speaking audience (Villagran Mora, 2020, p. 2).

However, the scarce and insufficient academic writing training cause many students to learn themselves learn academic writing themselves by reading similar papers to the ones they will write, or learn it indirectly or inductively by imitating or replicating the model scientific papers that they read. And many students still feel weak and claim for formative support throughout their academic writing process. Thus, to help the community, UNAM and DGECI implemented a program on academic writing in English (PAEAI) in the Faculty of Higher Studies Acatlán (FESA) which possesses a large language center and awareness of the imperative attention that academic writing in English deserves. The PAEAI aim is to gradually consolidate the teaching of academic writing across disciplines by implementing workshops, one-to-one tutoring support, and academic writing materials.

Thus, the high number of graduates who struggle in academic writing and that need to publish research results in English, the lack of exposure to English, the lack of sufficient training on academic writing in English, the need of UNAM’s internationalization, and the reading habits to learn academic writing implicitly influenced this empirical research that aims to identify the gaps and connections between L2 reading and writing in a non-English context.

A quick note about where we are in this project: essentially, we have conducted a needs analysis of postgraduate L2 writers at a Mexican university, and we would like reviewers’ help with how we might situate this data in a scholarly conversation about reading/writing connections in EFL contexts.

**Research Design:** Survey data (self-reported perceptions on reading/writing abilities and needs from both open- and close-ended questions) and qualitative data from 5 case studies (drafts of academic texts, video recordings of tutoring sessions about those drafts, and reflective interviews).

**Key Disciplinary Frames**

*Reading/Writing Connections in L2 Writers*

William Grabe’s *Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice* (2009) has been helpful for us to explain the complicated interactions between target postgraduates (PGs) at a Mexican university and the academic English texts they seek to replicate. Particularly, scholarship suggests that discourse-structure awareness (the ability to read textual structures strategically and rhetorically) can be difficult for these PGs as they move from modelling previous academic texts to (re)creating their research genres. However, our study participants rate their reading abilities as strong. But we sense that this study population has not received a lot of direct instruction on L2 reading, much less reading strategically for discourse structures.

We sense that there are some important connections and gaps between reading/writing. What perceptions do L2 writers have about the importance of reading academic articles as models for their own texts? Other L1-focused theory on mindful reading (Carrillo, 2017) or deep reading (Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, 2017) may be helpful, but we would love to know if others know about previous studies on strategic reading for academic writing in EFL contexts.

*Writing in the Disciplines*

This study began as needs analysis aimed at creating, supporting, and maintaining a writing center (WC) focused on PG academics at a large Mexican university. So, any potential interventions uncovered by our research would be employed through the WC, which has been virtual due to COVID-19. Here, we rely on previous studies that focus on PG writers, as they are often more difficult for tutors/teachers/writing program designers to work with because of the level of discipline-specific content in their texts (Geller & Eodice, 2013; Craig, 2016; Molina-Natera, 2017; Yu, 2020; Patrick, 2020).

Our sense from the case study data is that PGs often replicate other academic texts instead of adapting the structures for their own use. Would genre-based pedagogy be helpful, or would it further constrain the choices that L2 writers make (Liu, 2018)? What reading-to-write interventions might we try?

*Writing Studies in the Latin American Context*

The final main perspective is from the growing body of work in writing studies in the Latin American context (Carlino, 2012; Salager-Meyer, Llopis de Segura, & Castro Guerra Ramos, 2016; Molina-Natera & Lopez-Gil, 2018; Tapia-Ladino, Ávila Reyes, Navarro, & Bazerman, 2016). The pressure that Mexican PGs feel to publish in English is contextualized by other forces in Mexican and Latin American higher education, and we want this study to be in conversation with other studies in the same region.

***Glossary***

**Reading-writing gaps:** Needs or absence of something required in L2 academic writing or research written papers. Participants’ accounts of writing aspects needed, knowledge needed, weaknesses in knowledge, and/or expected knowledge from academic writing in English courses.

**Reading-writing connection:** Aspects converging in L2 academic reading and L2 academic writing such as that similar genres exists in L2 academic reading and L2 academic writing (i.e., research paper read and research paper produced), structure (moves) exists in model texts read and imitation of moves in papers produced, specific language (formal, specialized vocabulary, grammar) used in texts read exists also in texts produced, texts read by target audience and texts produced for a similar target audience.

**Abstract**

The study aimed to explore and understand existing gaps and connections between postgraduates’ (PGs) perceptions of their academic reading and writing skills in English in a Foreign Language (EFL) context. In the EFL context, teaching academic writing skills in English in PG programs across disciplines is scant (Carlino, 2012). Thus, many PG students struggle and try to learn academic writing by reading and replicating model texts’ prose in their fields of study. Thus, a needs analysis (NA) methodology, drafts, tutoring sessions, and interviews were used to gather data on the gaps between reading and writing from PG students across disciplines in a Mexican university where PGs are required to publish academic articles in English regardless their novice experience in academic writing. Eighty-five male and female students from different disciplines answered an online survey with close and open questions. Five out of 85 participants shared their drafts, participated in a tutoring session, and were interviewed. Participants were PGs from Mathematics and Engineering; Biology, Chemistry and Health Sciences; Social Sciences; and Humanities and Arts. These 85 PGs research, read literature in English, and need to write research papers for publishing in peer-reviewed journals, which generally receive papers written in English. Using descriptive statistics and thematic coding, we analyzed the data for patterns in PGs’ gaps and connections between their reading and writing for publication. Although in the survey close questions, participants self-reported strong reading skills, they also indicated that academic writing was a challenge in the EFL context. Further analysis of the open-ended questions suggests that PGs particularly struggled with applying knowledge from their academic reading into their own research and agenda for publication. Although reading seems to influence writing, formal instruction and writing advisors are needed to capitalize the writing skills that might have been acquired through reading. Especially because Harper (2021) pointed out that “L2 writing difficulties often stem from L2 reading difficulties”. Thus, to support PGs’ academic writing in English, it is necessary to understand the reading/writing gaps and connections to later implement more effective reading-writing courses, so students see writing in English as a relevant ability and connected to their disciplines (Driscoll, in Moore, 2012). The study contributes to knowledge by explaining the existence of specific reading-writing gaps and connections that were inferred from EFL PGs’ data and which might hinder or contribute to the achievement of academic writing.

***Keywords:*** *Academic writing, Genre, needs*

## **Justification**

Tapia-Ladino (2016) suggest rethinking writing from “a new hybrid discipline” beyond the overlapping education and predominant linguistics territories (p.193). Bazerman suggests that borrowing tools and theories from the disciplines might be a broader comprehensive view of the subject (Bazerman, 2011, in Tapia-Ladino, 2016). Tapia Ladino (2016) argues that reading and writing studies are connected to the disciplines, hence, they encompass a mutual responsibility. However, reading and writing are scarcely seen as a field on its own (p. 202). Clark and Hernandez (in Moore, 2012) suggest that to ease transfer to writing in the disciplines, the learners should master the rising awareness of genre.

## **Study aim**

To identify and understand the gaps and connections between reading and writing from PGs perceiving reading as their best skill as opposed to writing in an EFL context, where English is not the native language but Spanish, knowledge of writing research papers seems to be often acquired by students themselves through different reading resources and modes of delivery, learned in general English courses, or assumed to be known.

# **Research questions**

What gaps and connections do EFL postgraduates perceive in their academic reading and writing in English?

# **Methodology**

*Sample and participants*

We considered a stratified random sample (n=85) consisting of area 1a. Physics, Mathematics, and Engineering; area 2b. Biology, Chemistry and Health Sciences; area 3c. Social Sciences, and area 4d. Humanities and Arts to present a feature of each stratum (Navarro, 2013) and a nested sample of five volunteer cases out of 85 with a draft of an ongoing research paper section written in English, their tutoring session, and interview. Participants were postgraduate Mexican students and professors, male and female over 18 years old.

## **Needs Analysis Survey**

According to Bocanegra-Valle (2016), needs analysis is a systematic research methodology of needs used to design language courses and optimize language teaching and learning. For Upton (2012), needs analysis has been used mainly in English for Academic Purposes and English for Specific Purposes (in Bocanegra-Valle, 2016). The term “needs” has been referred with diverse still confusing terms (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.123, in Bocanegra-Valle, 2016, p. 560) including “*demands, deficiencies, concerns, necessities, lacks, wants, requirements, desires, expectations, constraints, difficulties*” (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016, p. 560). In this study, reading-writing gaps mean needs or absence of something required in L2 academic writing or research written papers. Participants’ accounts of writing aspects needed, knowledge needed, weaknesses in knowledge, and/or expected knowledge from academic writing in English courses. Reading-writing connection mean aspects converging in L2 academic reading and L2 academic writing such as that similar genres exists in L2 academic reading and L2 academic writing (i.e., research paper read and research paper produced), structure (moves) exists in model texts read and (imitation of) moves in papers produced, specific language (formal, specialized vocabulary, grammar) used in texts read exists also in texts produced, texts read by a target audience and texts produced by a similar target audience.

Needs can be gathered through quantitative, qualitative, inductive, and deductive research methods and specific data collection techniques (Jordan (1997; Long, 2005; Brown, 2009; in Bocanegra-Valle, 2016, p. 560) such as questionnaires and interviews, which are amongst the most common techniques used.

# **Data collection**

The study collected data through a survey in Spanish (see translation in appendix), pilot-tested with academics from the Mathematics and Engineering Division at UNAM FES Acatlán, to ensure comprehensible items. Minor wording adjustments were done and permissions from the participants and faculties were obtained. The survey applied online from March-June 2020 included a demographic section and a second about English proficiency, perception of participants’ best English ability (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening), and perception of participants’ writing in English. The third section included open questions including some about the features that an academic text in English must cover so it is accepted for publication in an international journal, the knowledge needed at university to write the academic text in English effectively for publication, the skills that have helped participants (with publications) write adequately an academic text in English for publication in an international journal, and the knowledge related to the writing of academic texts in English that were weak in participants and which have inhibited to write adequately for publication in an international magazine.

However, data collection techniques can possess benefits but also limitations. To manage limitations, researchers can use alternative options like texts, materials analysis, tests, and participant observation to complement data (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016, p. 560). Thus, we will re-analyze the five out of 85 participants’ academic writing drafts, online tutoring sessions, and follow-up interviews (on Zoom) collected in July-September 2020 to present more reliable findings.

**Interviews, tutoring, drafts**

We need to write these sections about the interviews, tutoring, and drafts.

# **Data analysis**

We need to describe descriptive statistics used for the survey and the thematic coding of qualitative data.

# **Survey initial results**

We need to write the descriptive main results. Survey results indicate that most participants self-reported strong reading skills and only six a strong writing ability. Most participants also reported the need to write scientific articles.

# **Interviews and tutoring initial findings**

Table 1 below shows data from interviews in which five participants accounted what they do to learn to write.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Interview data** | **Nested sample** |
| **Table 1. Actions done to develop writing** | **JossJ** | **Teresa** | **Seoklaur** | **Mariana**  | **Lena**  |
| Manner  | **Tutees’ learning strategies** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Independent  | Reading about writing |  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| I | Reading similar papers |  | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |
| I | Recycling a paper |  |  |  | ✓ |  |
| I | Imitating similar papers | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |
| I | Consulting resources online |  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| I | Diverse writing strategies (e.g., summarizing, synthesizing, thinking in English, avoiding writing like in Spanish, analyzing how others write) |  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Collaboration | Being advised by professors, supervisors, or friends |  | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |
| I-C | Genre’s transfer |  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| I-C | Journal and conference requirements  |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| I | L1 writing transfer to L2 |  | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |
| I | Previous own publications |  | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| I | Knowledge of English culture and structure |  |  |  | ✓ |  |
| I | Genre knowledge |  |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I | Awareness of L1 and L2 variations |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| I | Writing knowledge |  |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I | Knowledge of structure topic sentence |  |  |  |  |  |
| I | Writing by intuition |  |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I | Writing by thematic progression |  |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I | Learning writing on the march/journey |  |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I | Writing and thinking in English |  |  |  |  | ✓ |
|  | Past writing experiences |  |  |  |  | ✓ |

# **Tutoring initial findings**

Participants have more gaps concerning higher order concerns (HOCs), but also variations per participant and discipline. Gaps in language are less addressed.

# **Inferences based on interview and tutoring data**

Based on interviews and tutoring sessions with postgraduate cases (n=5, nested sample), it is inferred that when postgraduates read, they generally focus attention on organization of the paper, vocabulary, grammar, and functional language. Language learners seemed not extensively taught to read and/or write different genres from essays and stories centered on daily themes. Learning explicitly scientific reading and academic writing or reading and/or writing research articles in English throughout their studies are not part of their English language classes nor of the curriculum across disciplines. Students might take intensive courses of English for Specific purposes which aim students to learn the structure, language, and how texts work; courses that sometimes are focused on final product for publication rather than on how to construct knowledge, how to read critically and interconnect different information read (as Carrillo 2016 points out) in lots of literature, how to reintegrate and paraphrase it building an argument instead of just summarizing, synthesizing, or paraphrasing it, how to focus information or narrow down the research on one or two interconnected focusing themes, skills that seem to be challenging for them. Students seemed to be weak in how to focus on the most relevant research findings (one or two) of their studies when writing a research article and on how to discard temporarily the secondary results, or findings that they could use for another paper in the future. A gap on intertextual skills and multimodality seems to exist as they read diverse papers through different modes of delivery and sources (paper, internet, books, journals) to write integrating them in a concise and argumentative way, which seems challenging. Another inferred gap is that they read to imitate the macro structure of the paper, or the methodology used, or the data collection techniques, but they seem to unknow why those authors selected that organization (e.g., process, relevance, steps, sequential, chronological, thematic…) and/or that some data collection techniques can be more effective to explore inner thoughts (think aloud, verbal reports, interviews, focus groups) and others to gather lots of data to generalize and test hypothesis (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, tests). Another gap inferred is that some students do not have a clear understanding about where an opinion can be used in the paper, about the difference between opinions and arguments constructed, about differences amongst writing the methods, results, and discussion. Students seem to lack of sufficient clarity to write full descriptions of the methods used and results observed in the results section as opposed to discussing or arguing the results and their meaning or significance for the scientific knowledge in the discussion section. Finally, it is inferred that students generally learn reading skills addressing a single paper at a time, but they scarcely learn explicitly and systematically how to integrate intertextual knowledge or information accessed through different sources or works about a target topic.

# **Drafts**

However, we need to re-analyze drafts to illustrate examples of gaps or weaknesses of students’ academic writing.

# **Discussion**

We need to write it.

# **Conclusions, implications, and suggestions.**

We need to write them.

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Survey questions

**Pseudonym**:

**Age**:

**Occupation**: StudentProffesorResearcher

Another, ¿Which?

**Academic level:** BA in progressMA in progressDoctorate in progressBA obtainedMA obtainedDoctorate obtained

**Semester:**

**Study field/ Discipline:**

**Adscription at UNAM:** FES AcatlánENALLTChemistry FacultyMedicine Faculty

Another adscription at UNAM, ¿Which?

**I am Mexican native speaker of Spanish:**YesNo

**(a) My level of English is:** BasicIntermediateAdvanced

**(b) My certifications in English are:** PETKETFCETOEFLIELTSTOEICNone

**(c) Another certification obtained ¿Which?**

**(d) My best ability in English is:** ReadingWritingListeningSpeaking

**(e) My writing in English is generally:** GoodRegularBad

**(f) whilst writing in English, I feel:** HappySadSafeInsecureWorriedUnworriedUnstressedStressedRelaxedAnxiousMotivatedDemotivated

(g) Another state that you experience whilst writing academic texts in English, ¿Which?

**(1) Do I need to write academic English?** YesNo

**(2) Why do you need to learn to write academic English?**
a. For postgraduate studies
b. For international examinations
c. For promotion at work
d. For publishing scientific knowledge internationally
e. Because I like it
f. To deliver oral presentations in overseas conferences

(2.1) Do you have another reasons to learn to write academic English, ¿Which?

**(3) What type of academic text do you need to write in English?**

a. Scientific articleb. Essayc. Reportd. Book chaptere. None

(3.1) What other type of academic text do you need to write in English?

**(4) About which topic are you interested in writing in English at university?**

a. Sciencesb. Languagec. Healthd. Education

(4.1) About which other topic are you interested in writing in English at university?

**(5) What features does your academic text in English need to cover to be accepted for publication by an international journal?**

**(6) What kind of knowledge do you need as a university student to write effectively your academic text in English for publication?**

**(7) Have you ever published in an international journal an academic text in English?** YesNo

(7.1) If answer to **Q7** was “Yes”, please specify the type of text published.

**(8) If answer to Q7 was “Yes”, could you describe: What skills help you to write adequately a text in English for publication in an international journal?**

**(9) If the answer to Q7 was “No”, what kind of knowledge related to the writing of academic texts in English are weak in you, which have inhibited to write adequately to publish in an international journal?**

 **(10) What do you basically need to develop as a writer of academic texts in English?**a. To know grammar
b. To know to use the language for a specific purpose (narration, argumentation)
c. To know the features of diverse texts (language, structure, type of audience)
d. To consult printed resources (books, exercises)
e. Access to electronic resources (tutorials, interactive exercises)
f. Personalized tutorials with experienced writers

(10.1) Which other needs do you have to develop as a writer of academic texts in English?

 **(11) About which writing processes of writing an academic text in English do you need more support to improve how you write what you write?**

a. During editing the text (check and correct what is wrong, proofreading)
b. During refining a returned text with feedback from the journal to resubmit it
c. During the process of publishing the final text in an international journal
d. Before writing the text (know about what to write, how to generate ideas, discuss the topic)
e. During drafting a text
f. During revision of the text (what to add, delete, modify, or restructure the text)

(11.1) About which other writing process of writing an academic text in English do you need most support to improve how you write what you write?

**(12) What resources do you need the most to write academic texts in English?**
a. Courses, workshops, seminars of writing in English
b. Printed resources about writing in English (books, magazines, exercises)
c. Academic writing in English advisors
d. Electronic resources of writing in English (exercises, tutorials)
e. Discussion in classes about academic writing in English
f. Writing in English in my discipline

(12.1) What other resources do you need to write academic texts in English?

**(13) What do you prefer to learn to write academic texts in English?**
a. Resources online (exercises, tutorials, "software Grammarly")
b. Face-to-face instruction (courses, workshops seminars)
c. Independent learning (To consult books, analyze model texts)
d. Pair or teamwork
e. A class exclusively for academic writing in English as part of your study program
f. To have a space where to go to have individual support with a tutor

(13.1) What else do you prefer to learn to write academic texts in English?

**(14) What do you expect to have learned at the end of an academic writing course in English?**
a. To use prose adequately to achieve a purpose (narration, explanation, argumentation)
b. To write with correct grammar
c. To write different texts effectively (with language, organization, and for the corresponding audience)
d. To distinguish the styles of writing in Spanish vs in English
e. To follow the adequate procedures for publication in international journals
f. To know differences between spoken language and prose, and formal vs informal.

(14.1) What else do you expect to have learned at the end of an academic writing course in English?

**(15) What are your greatest strengths whilst writing academic texts in English**?

a. Grammar use
b. Punctuation use
c. Language use for specific function (to argue, compare, explain)
d. Strategy use (to plan, organize, revise, edit)
e. Knowledge about style to use in the text (APA, Harvard, Chicago, Vancouver)
f. Knowledge of the text format/genre to write

(15.1) What other aspects are part of your best strengths whilst writing academic texts in English?

**E-mail:**

**(17) Would you be available to participate in an interview if more details are required about your needs in academic writing in English?** YesNo

**Other comments that you want to add:**

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