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The English Writing Journey of L2 International Graduate Students

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The English Writing Journey of L2 International Graduate Students

by

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Abstract

This qualitative holistic multiple-case study examined how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. I leveraged a descriptive and explanatory holistic multiple-case study for this investigation. Data were analyzed from 13 L2 international student case study participant interviews, five university employee interviews, and hundreds of pages of document analysis. These data captured the actions, influences, and outcomes of these L2 international students relative to their English writing experiences, their preparation to come to the United States for graduate education, and their writing success once they arrived. The findings were that international students who came to the United States as L2 English language learners had a primary and secondary education with a limited emphasis on English despite attending English-medium schools. English writing education was a low priority, and there were few writing opportunities at the post-secondary level, negatively impacting their writing skills. These L2 International graduate students decided to come to the United States with a relatively short lead time. They did not prepare for English writing but did prepare for their English proficiency exams. Upon arrival, these L2 international students struggled with their initial writing assignments and had ongoing issues primarily with vocabulary, plagiarism, and the time it took them to write. Despite these challenges, these L2 international students improved their English writing abilities, enjoyed English writing, and were motivated to improve further. They knew what support systems helped them improve their writing skills, including feedback, practice, and group work. Providing English writing expectations to prospective and recently admitted L2 international students, questioning the importance of the English proficiency exam, giving new L2 international students opportunities to practice and receive feedback on their writing, and finding opportunities for university-offered writing support services to incoming L2 international students are options for administrators to explore.

Acknowledgments

It is hard to believe that at the age of 54, I am completing a dissertation and earning a terminal degree in education. After a career in the medical device industry as a clinical research leader, I took an unexpected fork in the road. I decided to share my experience with those looking to pursue careers in the clinical research profession. I believed I had the content knowledge, but I was less confident with the education side of the job. I was drawn to the opportunity to become a student again to learn more about performing this new role to the best of my ability. After a heartfelt discussion with my husband, recognizing the time commitment, I decided that adding an 'EdD' to my name was worth the time and energy.

My students are the biggest reason I enjoy going to work every day. They inspire me with their desire for knowledge and creating a better life for themselves and their families. Most of my students are from countries outside of the United States. I am regularly humbled by the fact they speak to me in a language that might be the second, third, or fourth one they learned. Meanwhile, I am ethnocentrically content with my monolingual abilities. As I worked with my brilliant L2 international graduate students over the years, who I met as doctors, dentists, pharmacists, engineers, and biochemists from their home countries, I have been troubled by the challenges they faced when they first submitted written assignments to me. I dedicate this work to them.

"You can do hard things," wrote Dr. Jennifer Jones in many emails she sent to her advisees over the past three years. I guess I can. I appreciate her, and Drs. Rachel Friedensen, Emeka Ikegwuonu, Brittany Williams, Steven McCullar, Claudia Tomany, and Michael Schwartz. They were the doctoral professors and dissertation committee members who taught me incredible things about higher education and pushed me to be a better educator and researcher.

Finally, and most importantly, I must recognize Andrew Collis-Prather, my husband and best friend. I did not tell many people that I was pursuing this degree. This was a personal goal; it almost seemed silly to go after it at my advanced age. However, I was a ‘first-gen’ college student, and getting to this point in my education was something I did not think would ever happen. Andrew always believed in my abilities and supported my goals. He sacrificed our time together and took on the lion’s share of the work at home as we prepared to sell our house and celebrate our twin girls’ graduation from high school. He even took the time to proofread every single paper I wrote in this doctoral program, as mind-numbing as some of them certainly were. I love him more than I could ever express in the acknowledgments section of a dissertation, but he knows that.

Finally, this might be cheeky to put in writing, but I am proud of myself. My parents have been gone for many years. However, they always made me feel, much like Dr. Jones often says, that I could do hard things. Again, I guess I can.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Aditya was a 28-year-old graduate student from India finishing his first semester at a Midwestern comprehensive public university. After obtaining his Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the Delhi Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research and working for three years as a pharmacist in a small town in Eastern India, he decided to come to the United States to pursue a graduate degree in clinical research. As he began his coursework, he found the subject matter challenging but very interesting, and there was no problem with mastering the learning objectives of the classes. However, whenever his coursework involved writing assignments, he found it very challenging to complete the work successfully, and his professors reflected that difficulty in his grades. He regularly had points deducted for poor grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, inconsistent paper formatting, and various forms of plagiarism.

This is a familiar story for many L2 international students who come to the United States to pursue higher education (Robertson, 2005). An increasing number of L2 international graduate students come from their native countries after completing their initial post-secondary education at English-medium universities and passing the mandatory English proficiency test to get accepted into their new United States universities (Zhou, 2022). However, they struggle academically, react negatively, and feel anxiety when given writing assignments (e.g., Park, 2016; Ravichandran et al., 2017). There is a significant body of research on how students for whom English is not their first language struggle with English writing and how these students learn English skills. However, significant research has yet to be conducted on why L2 international graduate students are not better prepared for English writing when they come to the United States for higher education, how they prepare, or if their preparations are adequate.

For this dissertation, I examined how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. I conducted a holistic multiple-case study using in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant writing samples, information from the participants' home institutions of higher education, English proficiency test results, and graduate school letters of recommendation as my data sources. Ultimately, I wanted the data from this research to elucidate the academic environments these L2 international graduate students came from, their experiences with writing, how prepared they were for English writing in the United States, and how their preparedness influenced their experiences when they started their graduate education. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Berry's (2005) model of acculturation made up the framework within which I constructed this research.

Background to the Study

In 2022, over 1.22 million international students were pursuing degrees in United States colleges and universities, with 57% in graduate programs (Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2022). These student numbers have grown year over year (Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2021). They received a college education and almost 40% were granted the opportunity to pursue practical on-the-job training associated with their field of study in the United States (United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, n.d.-b). This training comes in two forms: Curricular Practical Training (CPT) occurs before a student's graduation, and Optional Practical Training (OPT) typically occurs after their degree attending (United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, n.d.-a). OPT can extend up to three years post-graduation for students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Both CPT and OPT are granted to international students by the United States

government and the university they are attending (United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, n.d.-a).

As educators of international students, preparing them for job roles in their chosen fields during their internships and after graduation is part of the job. Employers seek out candidates with proficient writing skills. The National Association of Colleges and Employers indicated that almost 75% of employers look for evidence of proficient written communication skills on job candidates' resumes (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021). Although over 98% of employers indicated they valued the importance of candidates having this proficiency, less than 55% of employers successfully found candidates proficient in written communication (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021). Thus, as educators who prepare international students to enter the workforce, it is important to understand that candidates with good writing skills will have a competitive advantage.

As discussed by Cook (2016), Forbes (2021), and Lessard-Clouston (2017), labeling and describing learners of multiple languages can be complex and problematic. 'L1' and 'L2' have commonly been used to describe a student's native language (L1) and any subsequently learned languages (L2). However, there are many individuals from bilingual households or who have spoken more than one language their entire lives, creating a problem with this label (Forbes, 2021). In addition, many students have learned three or more languages throughout their lives (Lessard-Clouston, 2017). There is also a distinction between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Forbes, 2021). ESL learners typically live or work in the target language environment, whereas EFL learners have limited exposure to the language's sociocultural environment. Cook (2016) uses the term 'L2' to represent both ESL

and EFL learners who have various levels of "multi-competence" (p. 14) in more than one language beyond their native language(s).

I am interested in understanding the experiences of students from outside the United States who learned their English writing skills after learning their native language(s). Therefore, for this research, I will follow the nomenclature of Cook (2016) and use 'L2 English language learners' to inclusively represent those students who learned English as a second or foreign language or self-identified as not learning English as one of their first languages.

Scholars interested in the English writing challenges of L2 English language learners and L2 international students have conducted significant research. Social Learning Theory indicates that modeling is critical to successfully learning a behavior (Bandura, 1977). Components such as basic knowledge, practice, receiving feedback, and motivation are necessary for effective modeling (O'Rorke, 2006). L2 English language learners may have numerous years of English education but still may not understand many English writing basics (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Ginting, 2019; Zhan, 2015). English education practices outside of Western, predominantly English-speaking countries are variable when providing feedback and the opportunity to practice writing (Chen et al., 2016; Jabali, 2018; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017; Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015; Ravichandran et al., 2017).

L2 English language learners and L2 international students have English writing challenges with language use, mechanics, vocabulary, and writing style formatting (Al Badi, 2015; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Singh, 2019). When they come to the United States and other Western countries to study, they regularly have issues with self-confidence and anxiety, struggle with adapting to the new academic environment, and many do not understand the norms around academic plagiarism

(Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Iermolenko et al., 2021; Jiang & Chen, 2019). When taking their English proficiency exam, 67% of L2 international students scored the lowest on the writing portion compared to reading, writing, and listening (Collis-Prather, 2023). The challenges these students face with English writing and its impact on them suggest a need for research and pragmatic action. There has been little focus on understanding the academic preparation that L2 international students undergo, particularly for English writing, when coming to the United States to further their education. For this research, the degree to which a student was "prepared for English writing" depended on 1) their level of proficiency in English writing mechanics, language use, and vocabulary according to the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981), 2) their understanding of the US cultural norm rules plagiarism and source-referencing, and 3) their ability to incorporate these proficiencies and knowledge into US graduate school writing assignments.

Problem Statement

As stated in the background, researchers have reported the many challenges L2 English language learners and L2 international students face in English writing. However, limitations exist in the current body of research. Most research looked at a cohort of students evaluating a particular concern about English writing, such as describing their writing challenges or measuring their writing anxiety. There was scant research that looked holistically at an individual student's lifetime of English writing education and experience, how early or home-country English writing education and experiences influenced their success when they came to the United States, or how students prepared themselves for English writing in the United States.

There were multiple needs for this research. By better understanding how students' home institutions of education prepared them for English writing in the United States and how students

prepared themselves for English writing, educators can be better prepared to support them when they arrive to continue their education. In addition, United States institutions of higher education can appropriately incorporate expectations and preparation activities into recruitment and application discussions with students to help them prepare for success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative holistic multiple-case study was to examine how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. A potential pragmatic implication of this research was the opportunity to provide insight into how to better prepare L2 international students for English writing before they arrive in the United States for further education and how better to support them with their English writing challenges after arriving. At the collegiate level, policy and practice changes resulting from the outcomes of this research could make universities more successful at supporting L2 international students as they begin studying at their institution and create a less stressful environment for those students who are moving to a new academic and cultural environment.

Research Questions

I conducted this research with a focus on these three overarching research questions:

- How did L2 international graduate students' previous English writing education experience help prepare them for English writing in the United States?
- What pre-acculturation activities did L2 international graduate students engage in relative to English writing before coming to the United States?

- How did the L2 international students' pre-arrival education and pre-acculturation activities influence their English writing experiences after arriving in the United States for graduate school?

Overview of Methodology

Guided by the framework of Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Berry's (2005) model of acculturation, I used a holistic multiple-case study to explore my research questions. I used multiple data sources to construct comprehensive historical descriptions of the educational experiences of a group of L2 international graduate students and explored how those experiences influenced their readiness for English writing as graduate students in the United States.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Berry's (2005) model of acculturation made up the framework within which I constructed this research. According to SLT, effective modeling must occur where faculty and curriculum play a significant role in learning a particular behavior successfully (O'Rorke, 2006). In this research, I used the tenets of SLT modeling to examine how the home educational settings of L2 international graduate students supported their English writing skills and prepared them for the English writing expectations that awaited them when they came to institutions of higher education in the United States. Berry's (2005) model of acculturation is based on four strategies relative to the relationship between, in this case, the international student and the host university. The strategy of "assimilation" is necessary for English writing, as the university will expect international students to meet their predefined English writing expectations. Berry's model of acculturation

predicts a moderate level of stress with this strategy, particularly if the student is unprepared for the assimilation (Berry, 2005). With this research, I evaluated the students' levels of preparation.

Methodology

I leveraged a descriptive and explanatory holistic multiple-case study for this investigation. Case studies were an appropriate methodology for this research topic, as researchers use them to investigate, understand, and discover causal links of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Duff, 2012; Hays, 2004; Yin, 2014). They also utilize multiple data sources, increasing credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A multiple-case study was appropriate for this research project because each participant's experience occurred in a different context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A single case study may be idiosyncratic; however, examining multiple cases of the same phenomenon across different contexts can generate more generalizable results (Hay, 2004; Yin, 2014).

Methods

Case study research is a qualitative design with multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The primary data source was semi-structured, in-depth interviews with each case participant, an L2 international graduate student at a four-year college in the Midwestern United States. Additional data came from semi-structured interviews with a group of university employees who engaged with international students before and after they applied and began their studies at the university. Other data sources were documents from the participants, including writing samples, transcripts, English proficiency test results, letters of recommendation, and online documentation from the participants' home institutions of higher education that provided insight into the content of the course curriculum. I also had multiple writing assignments these

students had submitted in a communications class they took in the United States within the past two years.

I transcribed all interviews into Word documents and created a short holistic descriptive individual case report for each L2 international graduate student participant. I uploaded interview transcriptions, writing samples, letters of recommendation, webpage screenshots, course syllabi information, college transcripts, and English proficiency test results into the NVivo 12 Plus qualitative data analysis software. I used an individual-level logic model analytic technique for this study to organize and analyze my data and answer my research questions (Yin, 2014). This analytic model focused on the actions, interventions, and outcomes related to these students and their English writing (Yin, 2014). I dissected the statements from the case participant and university personnel interviews and coded their statements with unique descriptive codes. I combined codes into categories and categories into themes. The strongest themes across cases (i.e., those with significant cross-case evidence) founded the answers to my research questions and research implications. All other data sources were used to support or refute the developing findings. (Duff, 2012; Yin, 2014).

Key Terms

In this dissertation, I will utilize frequently used terms in the research fields of L2 English language learners and international students. Table 1 lists and defines the terms most relevant to this research.

Table 1

Research Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Acculturation	"the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005, p.698)
English as a Foreign Language (EFL)	L2 English language learner who has limited exposure to the language's sociocultural environment (Forbes, 2021)
English as a Second Language (ESL)	L2 English language learner who lives or works in the target language environment (Forbes, 2021)
Holistic	a case study where the unit of analysis is a single case where the case and the data supporting it have a unique context (Yin, 2014)
International Student	a student who has left his or her country or territory of origin and moved to another country or territory with the singular objective of studying (Clark, 2009)
L2 English Language Learner	a student who learned English as a second or foreign language, or who self-identified as not learning English as one of their first languages (Cook, 2016)
Logic Model	a case study analytic technique where the data is organized to describe the actions, interventions, and outcomes of a chain of occurrences or events (Yin, 2014)
Pre-acculturation	"the changes experienced by a potential migrant after making the decision to emigrate, having contact (indirectly or directly) with the society of immigration, and starting preparations for the upcoming migration" (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijala, 2011, p. 500)
Prepared for English Writing	For the purposes of this research, the degree to which a student was "prepared for English writing" depended on 1) their level of proficiency in English writing mechanics, language use, and vocabulary according to the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981), 2) their understanding of the US cultural norm rules of plagiarism and source-referencing, and 3) their ability to incorporate these proficiencies and knowledge into US graduate school writing assignments

Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation includes a comprehensive literature review, an overview of my research methodology, the study findings, and a discussion of those findings.

For the literature review in the next chapter, I will first describe my theoretical framework and how my research fits into the existing literature. Next, I will review the research on the academic and cultural components of L2 English language learners and L2 international student writing competency challenges. Then, I will cover the research on how early education, practice, coaching, and motivation influenced these learners' English writing skills. I will also review the literature on social and academic pre-arrival acculturation by international students. In the third chapter of this dissertation, I will provide a comprehensive review of the methods and methodology for this study, as well as a discussion of my research perspective and positionality. I will also describe the steps I will take to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data. Finally, I will walk through how I protected the rights and welfare of the human subjects who participated in this research.

In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I will share the findings of my research. I will start with a summary of each case study participant, including their English writing education experiences, their preparation for coming to the United States, and their experiences once they arrive. Then, I will review the overall findings from the interviews and document analysis. I will base this on the major themes from my analysis. In the final chapter, I will discuss the results of my research within the context of answering my overarching research questions. I will provide my perspectives on the research and how these findings supported the existing research on this topic. Then, I will share the limitations of this research and the implications of its findings to theory, practice, and future research.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative holistic multiple-case study was to examine how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to

graduate-level writing in the United States. I embedded this project into the existing research on the writing challenges of L2 English language learners and L2 international students. In this chapter, I provided a high-level overview of this research and proposed an academic research gap. Specifically, unlike the existing literature that looks narrowly at the English writing challenges of L2 English language learners and L2 international students, I took a holistic view of individual students' lifetime of English writing education and experiences and examined how those students are prepared for English writing in the United States. This gap created an opportunity for this study to add value to future L2 international graduate students and the educators who support them.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review of the extant literature supporting this research will start with the theoretical framework within which I designed this study. I will then focus on the research examining the challenges that L2 English language learners and L2 international students experienced with their English writing before and after coming to the United States. These challenges come in two main categories: academic and cultural. Academically, students have challenges in practical areas of writing, such as language use, mechanics, and vocabulary (Jacobs et al., 1981). From a cultural perspective, students face differences in education systems and cultural norms, including the rules and gravity of plagiarism, that influence how they feel about writing. Next, I review the literature on how L2 English language learners and L2 international students learned and reinforced their English writing skills. I discuss research on their primary and secondary English writing education, opportunities to practice writing, coaching and feedback they received on their writing, and their motivation to learn English writing skills. Finally, I review the research on the social and academic pre-acculturation of international students entering the United States higher education system.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Berry's (2005) model of acculturation made up the framework within which I constructed this research. Bandura (1977) posited that learning resulted from observing others and witnessing the consequences of their behaviors. Bandura (1986, 1997) described his theory by explaining that a student will increasingly build competence and confidence through four sources of influence; mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. In

mastery experiences, students can prove they can independently perform the task effectively. In vicarious experiences, they can watch others who perform the task effectively. With social persuasion, a student is encouraged by someone they trust that they are effectively performing the task, and through physiological and emotional states, students are internally convinced that performing the task is a good thing for them to do (Deri, 2022).

For an educator to provide a student with these influences, they must effectively teach the skill, allow their students to practice what they learned, provide encouraging and productive feedback, and share why learning the skill is essential (Deri, 2022). More simply, from the student's perspective, students need knowledge, practice, feedback, and motivation to learn effectively (O'Rorke, 2006). For college students learning an academic skill such as writing, their faculty and the curriculum they develop are critical for their success.

In this research, I used the tenets of SLT modeling to examine how L2 English language international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. These students learned English writing skills in primary and secondary school, so a foundation of skills was typically present but variable in strength (e.g., Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ceylan, 2019; Ginting, 2019). The degree to which the other Social Learning Theory components were present in their English education seemed likely also to have been inconsistent (e.g., Ceylan, 2019; Jabali, 2018; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017), particularly relative to the expectations waiting for them at institutions in the United States. This difference could have contributed to the English writing challenges that L2 English language international students experienced.

Acculturation is the "dual process of cultural and psychological change that occurs as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members." (Berry,

2005, p. 698). Berry's acculturation model categorizes the strategic adaptations of individuals along two dimensions (Berry, 1992). One dimension measures the retention or rejection of the individual's native culture, and the other dimension measures the adoption of the host culture. Based on these two dimensions, individuals in new environments will exhibit one of four different acculturation strategies at any given time (Berry, 1992). The strategy of the individual could shift depending on the context or activity (Berry, 1992). "Assimilation" occurs when an individual abandons their native culture and fully embraces their host culture, and "separation" occurs when individuals retain their native culture and reject the host culture. "Integration" results from an individual adopting the cultural norms of their host while maintaining their native culture. Conversely, "marginalization" results from an individual rejecting both their native and host cultures (Berry, 1992).

Each strategy confers a different stress level relative to the possible acculturation actions. This is because each strategy results in varying degrees of cultural shedding (giving up a portion of one's cultural identity), cultural learning (picking up a component of the host culture's identity), or cultural conflict (the inability or indecision to culturally shed or culturally learn), all of which can confer stress (Berry, 2005). Cultural conflict is almost always stressful, and cultural shedding and learning can be stressful if the action is forced or performed begrudgingly (Berry, 2005).

Berry's (2005) model of acculturation aligns well with an international student coming to a university in the United States. For these students, the least stressful strategy would be "integration," where there is a strong relationship between the university and the student, and the student maintains a strong sense of heritage, culture, and identity (Berry, 2005). For English writing specifically, however, an action aligned with the strategy of "assimilation" is almost

mandatory for success. Even though there will be a positive relationship between the host university and the international student, the university will require that the international student assimilate to their English writing expectations. Berry's acculturation model predicts a moderate stress level with this strategy, particularly if the student is unprepared for the assimilation (Berry, 2005). Schumann (1986) predicted that L2 English language learners moving to an English-speaking location would acquire the English language to the degree that they acculturated to their new home. However, the results were highly variable.

L2 English Language International Student English Writing Competency

Academic Components

Spoken by more than 1.5 billion native and non-native speakers, English is the most widely spoken language in the world (Statista, 2023). However, as evidenced by the textbooks available to instructors and students specifically written to help L2 English language international students with their academic writing, the challenges that these students face with English writing skills are common and not a new area of study (e.g., Bailey, 2015; Christison & Krahnke, 1986; Houghton, 2014; Swales, 1987; Tran, 2013). Unlike some of the other aspects of English language learning, such as speaking and listening, the environment a student lives and learns in can play a significant role in helping them develop their skills over time (Kellogg, 2008; Zhang & Mi, 2010). However, as L2 international students spend time on English-speaking campuses, writing skills do not improve at the same rate (Kellogg, 2008; Zhang & Mi, 2010). Writing coherently and effectively "is a difficult and protracted achievement of cognitive development that contrasts sharply with the acquisition of speech" (Kellogg, 2008, p. 2). In most cultures, children have a highly developed spoken language vocabulary by age five, but writing is a cultural skill that may never develop (Kellogg, 2008). After two years in an English-taught

courses, a group of Chinese multilingual English-speaking students improved dramatically in their reading, speaking, and comprehension skills. However, “their writing skills did not seem to improve visibly over time” (Zhang & Mi, 2010, p. 380).

L2 English language learners claimed writing was more difficult to learn than reading, listening, and speaking (Lee & Tajino, 2008; Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015; Rahmat et al., 2022). Similarly, instructors of students for whom English was not their first language claimed that this difficulty leads to a reluctance to practice their writing (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Melketo & Tessema, 2012). Because understanding and remembering the rules of writing required a higher level of cognitive ability than speaking or listening, it was unsurprising that there were challenges in writing mechanics faced by all English writing students (Goldstein, 2017), or that challenges faces by L2 English language learners, in particular, are numerous and varied (Kellogg, 2008).

English language use (e.g., verb tense, articles, prepositions, pronouns; Abrar et al., 2023; Jacobs et al., 1981) was the most common challenge cited in the literature by L2 English language and L2 international students attempting to learn English writing skills (Ahmed & Alamin, 2012; Akhtar et al., 2019; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Limeranto & Mbato, 2022; Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Nik et al., 2010; Riazantseva, 2012). The most challenging and frequently discussed language use issues included verb tenses, subject-verb agreements, personal pronouns, and articles (Al Fadda, 2012; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Chou, 2011; Fareed et al., 2016; Zhan, 2015). Students felt their previous faculty only taught them a basic knowledge of English grammar, and they confused their native grammar rules with English grammar rules (Al Murshidi, 2014; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Ginting, 2019; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Rico, 2014; Zhan, 2015). Similarly, Irzawati et al.

(2021) found that Indonesian students regularly omitted words from their sentences, which made their meaning difficult to decipher. The challenges students experienced with language use made it difficult to express their ideas (Qian & Krugly-Smolska, 2008; Singh, 2019). Abrar et al. (2023) cited language use as a primary barrier to a group of L2 international students in the United Kingdom completing their dissertations.

Additionally, how they expressed their ideas in their native language differed, so a direct translation to English was problematic (Abrar et al., 2023; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Ravichandran et al., 2017). A body of literature proposed a different approach for L2 English writing instructors. Jordan (2005, 2009, 2015, 2023) argued that multiculturalism should be embraced in English writing classrooms as much as any other aspect of an L2 English learner's life. Having "translingual values" (Jordan, 2015, p. 365), an English writing instructor at a United States institution of higher education should examine their view on the dichotomy of the domestic student versus the L2 international student. Since language is socially constructed, they could acknowledge that there may be alternate means of expressing viewpoints that do not necessarily comply with traditional English grammar rules (Jordan, 2005). There are numerous advocates for this pedagogical philosophy, but many see L2 English language instruction as a means to effectively prepare writers to communicate in the target language (Silva & Wang, 2021). However, this perspective was directed at English composition writing instructors, with no reference to the added challenges of scientific or technical writing (Jordan, 2005, 2009, 2015).

Another common area for errors was with writing mechanics, including misused punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (Hasan & Marzuki, 2017; Irzawati et al., 2021; Nasser, 2019; Nugraheni & Basya, 2018; Rahmat et al., 2022; Toba et al., 2019; Zhan, 2015). Relative to expressing ideas, L2 international students from many different countries also had significant

challenges with accurately and cohesively structuring the content in their sentences and paragraphs (Ahmed & Alamin, 2012; Akhtar et al., 2019; Al Badi, 2015; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Fareed et al., 2016; Hasan & Marzuki, 2017; Nugraheni & Basya, 2018; Rahmatunisa, 2014; Riazantseva, 2012; Singh, 2019). Al Fadda (2012) reported that a group of L2 English learners from Saudi Arabia regularly included sentence fragments in their writing and struggled when attempting to write compound sentences. This challenge resulted in students' inability to effectively share research results, test answers, and personal viewpoints. Standard English practices in academic writing, such as including a thesis statement in a paragraph, were also new to them (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017).

Another major challenge for L2 English language learners and L2 international students is their limited knowledge of English vocabulary. Students from China, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other parts of the Middle East were challenged to find the right words to express their thoughts effectively relative to their native languages (Ahmed & Alamin, 2012; Al Murshidi, 2014; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Chou, 2011; Fareed et al., 2016; Lee & Tajino, 2008; Limeranto & Mbato, 2022; Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Qian & Krugly-Smolska, 2008). Other students struggled with understanding the academic words they needed to know to accurately discuss their discipline (Al Badi, 2015; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Singh, 2019). Ginting (2019) described how Indonesian students regularly used incorrect words to express an idea or misspelled words that would distort the passage's meaning. Because of their limited vocabulary, some students reverted to an informal writing style and instead wrote as they spoke in their native language. This resulted in passages of writing that were too informal or did not clearly articulate the students' intended meanings (Fareed et al., 2016; Rahmatunisa, 2014).

Beyond the challenges that L2 English language learners and L2 international students faced with language use, mechanics, and vocabulary, research has documented hurdles that created additional burdens for these students relative to their native English-speaking peers. Formal writing styles, such as AMA, Chicago, and APA, were uncommon in many countries, and students had to learn them when they came to United States institutions of higher education (Ravichandran et al., 2017). This lack of familiarity increased students' perceptions of writing difficulty (Lee & Tajino, 2008). Paraphrasing was another issue for many students (Al Badi, 2015; Qian & Krugly-Smolska, 2008). Because of their language use and vocabulary challenges, it was difficult for students to synthesize ideas and put them into their own words. Finally, when given writing assignments, L2 English language learners and L2 international students' challenges result in them taking much longer to complete their work than their peers (Ravichandran et al., 2017).

The academic challenges that L2 English language learners and L2 international students face while learning and developing their writing skills are numerous, significant, and widespread across geographies and academic disciplines. Educators in the United States who teach students for whom English is not their first language should be aware and prepared to support students as they continue to deal with these challenges as they enter United States universities as graduate students.

Cultural Challenges

Beyond the academic components that L2 English learner and L2 international students struggled with, there were cultural challenges that these students faced with their English writing. As multilingual speakers, L2 English language learners and L2 international students had low self-confidence and anxiety, which affected or was associated with their writing quality

and motivation to develop writing skills (Akhtar et al., 2019; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Huwari & Aziz; 2011; Jebreil et al., 2015; Park, 2016; Ravichandran et al., 2017). Numerous studies on the academic challenges that L2 English language learners and L2 international students faced while writing also reported negative attitudes, high levels of anxiety, low self-confidence, reluctance, doubts, insecurity, or apprehension about writing (Akhtar et al., 2019; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Ravichandran et al., 2017). Park (2016) reported that L2 international students' anxiety about writing was a significant concern when coming to the United States for their education. While few studies directly linked writing anxiety to writing performance, Erkan and Saban (2011) showed a significantly negative relationship between apprehension level and writing performance.

Other studies reported on the high levels of anxiety that L2 English language learners have relative to their writing abilities and suggested solutions for reducing their apprehension. Al-Sawalha and Chow (2012) reported that almost 75% of Jordanian ESL college students in their study had high levels of English writing anxiety but failed to use any of the writing strategies taught to them. Alternatively, Rico (2014) found that English writing anxiety was reduced when a cohort of Colombian ESL college students worked on their writing assignments in small groups. Atay and Kurt (2006) indicated that 81% of Turkish post-secondary ESL learners had moderate to high writing anxiety. The instructors were the source of the stress, as the students feared failure and poor grades.

Some researchers reported that there may be mediating factors to English writing anxiety. Jebreil et al. (2015) reported that gender influenced English writing anxiety levels in Iranian ESL learners, with men more anxious about the activity than women. Conversely, Huwari and Aziz

(2011) showed no differences in writing anxiety levels between genders in Jordanian post-secondary ESL learners. However, younger students and those at lower socioeconomic levels had higher anxiety levels. Although potentially related to anxiety, apprehension, or low self-confidence, some study results suggested that the writing hesitancy of L2 English language learners may have resulted from them not enjoying the writing process (Osman, 2019; Rahmatunisa, 2014; Toba et al., 2019).

Research results on this topic demonstrated some variability in English writing anxiety by L2 English language learners and L2 international students. Morton et al. (2015) found variation in writing perceptions by L2 international students in Australia. The variation was based on their discipline, with the science-focused students having poorer perceptions of writing. There are data showing that some L2 English language learners had very low anxiety, high self-confidence, and positive attitudes toward English writing (Ceylan, 2019; Jabali, 2018). Ceylan (2019) surveyed a group of Turkish ESL college students, and although they admitted to struggling with the writing process, on average, they indicated a low level of anxiety. Similarly, a study of over 100 Palestinian ESL post-secondary students reported that they enjoyed the writing process and had very few negative thoughts about it (Farrah, 2012).

Differences in educational norms between countries forced students to adjust to new educational environments, limiting their success in English writing (Al Badi, 2015; Iermolenko et al., 2021; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Singh, 2019). In some countries, faculty emphasized rote memorization rather than writing and critical thinking in the curriculum, so developing those skills was not a priority (Ravichandran et al., 2017; Singh, 2019). Al Badi (2015) documented L2 international students who acknowledged that their new professors' expectations of them differed from what they had previously experienced and were uncomfortable asking for clarification.

Similarly, even L2 international students who started as strong writers were slow to adapt to new academic norms, such as formal writing styles and strict plagiarism rules, because of the "institutional baggage" (Iermolenko et al., 2021, p. 2) they brought with them from their home countries.

More serious academic writing norms have also been problematic for L2 international students, including plagiarism and copyright violation concerns (Al Badi, 2015; Jiang & Chen, 2019; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Riazantseva, 2012; Singh, 2019). Students from some countries where plagiarism was acceptable never learned the skill of synthesizing and paraphrasing information, so either their writing quality suffered, they were cited for copying others' work without referencing it, or they submitted papers created primarily from large sections of block quotations (Al Badi, 2015; Jiang & Chen, 2019; Riazantseva, 2012). Even when students understood the rules around plagiarism, they did not have the academic tools to avoid it (Ravichandran et al., 2017). Singh (2019) reported that some college-aged ESL students had to be educated on the norm that having someone else translate their writing assignment from their native language to English was unacceptable.

These academic and cultural challenges are well-established in the literature and are ubiquitous across many cultures and academic disciplines. Faculty of L2 international students coming to the United States for further education should expect to see them in their students and look to find ways to support students through their challenges.

Learning and Reinforcing English Writing Skills

In alignment with Social Learning Theory, for L2 international students to be prepared as English writers before coming to the United States, they must be effectively influenced by mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional

states (Deri, 2022). In other words, they must have learned, practiced, received feedback, and been motivated to develop their English writing skills (O'Rorke, 2006). In the following sections, I will review the literature on how L2 English language learners and L2 international students learned and reinforced their English writing skills. I will discuss research on their primary and secondary English writing education, opportunities to practice writing, coaching and feedback they received on their writing, and their motivation to learn writing skills.

Primary and Secondary English Writing Education

Several researchers reported that the challenges faced by L2 English language and L2 international students relative to their writing skills stemmed from a poor academic foundation (Al Murshidi, 2014; Altinmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017; Toba et al., 2019). Altinmakas and Bayyurt (2019) reported that secondary English education in Turkey minimized the importance of writing and focused on reading, speaking, and listening, which the faculty regarded as critical to knowledge acquisition. Similarly, in a study evaluating the background of L2 international students studying in the United States, Eldaba and Isbell (2018) found that writing was a minimal part of the English learning curriculum in numerous countries in the Middle East.

Other studies' data indicated that students felt they were not taught the basic English writing skills necessary to succeed in the United States (Al Murshidi, 2014; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017; Toba et al., 2019). Chinese international students in a Midwestern United States university indicated they learned English writing differently and had to relearn many writing rules necessary for success (Bawa & Watson, 2017). In a survey of almost 2,000 Nigerian ESL post-secondary learners, the students indicated they were not taught enough basic writing skills (Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). Similarly, Al Murshidi (2014) reported on their survey of

207 native Gulf-region international students who believed they were only taught the bare minimum of writing skills.

Even when students went through many years of English language education that included writing in the curriculum, the results from many studies reported a low level of English writing competence (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Bilal et al., 2013; Irzawati et al., 2021; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Osman, 2019; Nugraheni & Basya, 2018). For example, in a study of 25 fourth-semester students of English at an Indonesian university who had studied English for at least eight years, Nugraheni and Basya (2018) found that their writing knowledge was between below basic and basic, which equated to the "Beginning" range of English language skills in other standardized evaluations (Jacobs et al.,1981). Bilal et al. (2013) suggested that overcrowded classrooms and underfunded education systems, which resulted in a lack of necessary supplies in some Middle Eastern regions, may have been part of the problem. Researchers in other regions, such as Asia and Africa, reported that poor knowledge, lack of faculty training, and faculty apathy were potential issues (Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Osman, 2019).

As I will discuss in more detail later, many of these researchers made suggestions for how to improve English writing education for L2 English language learners that were tied to the concepts of motivation, practice, and feedback (e.g., Al Murshidi, 2014; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Osman, 2019). Fareed et al. (2016) proposed some specific effective teaching strategies, such as conscious teaching of vocabulary and developing a writing culture equal to speaking. They also suggested that teachers should be trained in effective teaching practices, including providing positive and constructive feedback, opportunities for feedback, and motivation for writing (Fareed et al., 2016). However, without a strong foundation before entering post-

secondary education, students may be at a disadvantage that could carry through to their arrival in the United States as L2 international students.

English Writing Practice

There was substantial research on practice and its role in teaching and reinforcing L2 English language learners and L2 international students' writing skills. The data from several studies out of the Middle East reported that practice was the primary approach for improving L2 English learners' writing abilities (Akhtar et al., 2019; Haider, 2012). Opportunities to practice English writing resulted in improved writing skills and positive feelings toward writing (Abas & Aziz, 2016; Faraj, 2015; Nasser, 2019). Nasser (2019) documented that practice was a clear component of a group of Iranian English writing learners, reducing their error frequency. Abas and Aziz (2016) reported on Indonesian ESL college students who acknowledged that they had positive attitudes and feelings about writing because they practiced regularly. Faraj (2015) showed that practice built within a scaffolded support system resulted in students who had the perception that they were better writers. The opportunities to practice also increased their interest in understanding the meaning of the feedback they received and learning from their mistakes.

Similarly, the results from several studies showed the deleterious practical effects when L2 English language learners did not practice their English writing skills. (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ceylan, 2019; Irzawati, 2021; Toba et al., 2019). Some data showed that a lack of practice resulted in negative attitudes toward writing (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Sun & Wang, 2020). A low amount of writing practice was reported as a contributing factor to why multilingual writing students had difficulties with English language use, vocabulary, and mechanics (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ceylan, 2019; Irzawati et al., 2021; Toba et al., 2019). Asadifard and Koosha (2013) reported that a lack of an opportunity to

practice led to writing reluctance in a group of ESL Iranian college students. Similarly, the results from a study of 330 Chinese college students enrolled in an English course showed that a lack of self-confidence correlated to their limited ability to practice their English writing skills (Sun & Wang, 2020).

L2 English language learners and L2 international students understood the value of practicing. In a qualitative study of L2 international students in the United States conducted to understand their perceptions of English writing, students across 11 countries acknowledged that practice would improve their writing (Ravichandran et al., 2017). Melissourgou and Frantzi (2015) reported that ESL college learners in Greece wanted more opportunities to practice, as did a group of Malaysian English writing students (Rahmat et al., 2022). Similarly, 64 Chinese ESL post-secondary learners acknowledged that practicing was very important to develop their English writing skills (Chen et al., 2016). The same acknowledgment was made by ESL college students studying English writing in Indonesia, Palestine, and Nigeria (Fitriani & Sabarniati, 2021; Jabail, 2018; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). Despite the clear importance of practicing English writing for skill development, it was still an activity that needed encouragement and support. Some ESL learners, such as those reported in studies from Colombia and Pakistan, admitted that they would only practice if forced (Bilal et al., 2013; Dar & Khan, 2015; Rico, 2014).

The value of practicing English writing in developing English writing skills by L2 English language learners was evident in the literature. It appeared well-known by students and faculty alike. However, the barriers to practicing, both logistically and psychologically, may have gotten in the way of L2 English language learners and L2 international students benefiting as much as possible. This is another factor that may prevent L2 international students who come to the United States for advanced degrees from having more developed English writing skills.

English Writing Coaching

Coaching is another essential tenet of Social Learning Theory needed for faculty to reinforce English writing skills for their students (Deri, 2022; O'Rorke, 2006). Researchers studied different aspects of coaching and feedback for L2 English language learners, specifically related to English writing (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Endley & Karim, 2022; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Hoomanfard, 2017; Karim & Nassaji, 2019; Nasser, 2019; Pham, 2022). Most generally, the results from multiple studies documented the positive impact of coaching and feedback on students' writing skills (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2016; Faraj, 2015; Nassaji, 2011; Qian & Krugly-Smolska, 2008; Qosayere, 2015). Students believed that instructor feedback helped them improve their language use, English vocabulary, and writing confidence (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). They wanted more feedback from their faculty, friends, peer mentors, and campus writing centers (Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Rahmat et al., 2022; Ravichandran et al., 2017).

However, instructors did not always provide the feedback and coaching students sought. Students acknowledged needing more instructor feedback on their English writing skills (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019). Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) reported that students wanted feedback on their research paper revisions because it helped them with writing anxiety. Similarly, students knew how important it was to receive coaching and feedback. Multiple researchers reported that students believed written feedback was the best way to improve their writing and that a lack of feedback could have been a potential cause of writing reluctance (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Qosayere, 2015). Chen et al. (2016) reported that students valued the feedback, read it in detail, and used it to improve their writing assignments.

L2 English language learners had opinions on the types of feedback they received from their English writing instructors (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Bawa & Watson, 2017; McMartin-Miller, 2014). The results from multiple studies demonstrated that students wanted instructors to mark every error on their written submissions (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; McMartin-Miller, 2014). Similarly, Bawa and Watson (2017) stated that one-on-one feedback was most important to students. However, McMartin-Miller (2014) reported that students struggled with the feedback they received. Similar to research published by Okpe and Onjwu (2017), students did not always understand how to interpret the feedback on the papers returned to them or what the instructors expected them to do with it, thereby defeating the purpose of instructors providing feedback. To complicate matters for instructors, Osman (2019) reported on a study conducted with instructors of Malaysian ESL college students who indicated that their students had a wide variety of preferences for how written feedback was provided. Similarly, in a study across three sections of an English writing composition course for L2 international students, McMartin-Miller (2014) found that all the instructors used different methods for providing feedback, ranging from selective to comprehensive.

To address the issue of students effectively using the feedback they receive, instructors of L2 English writing learners provided feedback and coaching with varied methods (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Faraj, 2015; McMartin-Miller, 2014; Nassaji, 2011). For example, Faraj (2015) described the successful outcomes of a step-by-step scaffolding method for giving feedback to English writing students compared to the traditional redlining feedback on written assignments reported in other studies (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). Similarly, combining oral feedback with an interactive scaffolded method of writing support positively impacted students' future writing abilities.

There was a long debate over whether feedback that involved correcting the language use of L2 language writers was ineffective or even harmful. Truscott (1996) believed that because learning to write was a gradual process, learners would not be prepared to understand corrections made beyond their stage of development. Instead, he predicted that students would only exhibit "pseudolearning" (Truscott, 1996; p. 345) and mimic what their teacher showed them. He also warned that correcting all language use errors would only be effective if teachers were skilled enough to catch every error and be consistent in their feedback (Truscott, 1996). Finally, he suggested that this type of feedback could be harmful because it took time from the teacher and student that could be better used on other activities and could cause stress and demotivate the student (Truscott, 1996). Ferris (1999) countered that corrective feedback should not be categorically condemned, as there were likely situations where L2 English language writers benefited from this type of feedback, which should be studied further. After additional debate between Truscott and Ferris (Ferris, 2004; Truscott, 1999), Ferris encouraged ongoing research on corrective feedback, as a single best practice may not exist (Ferris, 2004).

Research on corrective feedback continued. Some instructors believed that line-by-line, detailed feedback demoralized and demotivated students (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010). However, direct corrective feedback, where the instructor not only marked the error but told students how to correct the error, was a commonly researched form of feedback with mostly positive results (Endley & Karim, 2022; Evans et al., 2011; Hammad, 2015; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Mirzaii & Aliabadi, 2013). Three separate studies with groups of L2 international students in the United States and Canada demonstrated that this feedback improved writing accuracy over time (Endley & Karim, 2022; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Similarly, Endley and Karim (2022) reported on a study of L2 English language learners in the

Middle East using direct corrective feedback. They found that students' writing improved in accuracy over time, but only when the learners had the opportunity to revise their papers immediately, versus learning from their mistakes and applying the knowledge to future papers. Conversely, a group of L2 English language learners from Palestine who received direct corrective feedback from their instructors did not improve their essay writing abilities over time compared to peers whose instructors only marked their errors (Hammad, 2015).

Instructors of L2 English language learners and L2 international students started using technology to augment the writing feedback process (Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012; Ene & Upton, 2018; Pham, 2022; Quintero, 2008). In two different studies, Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012) and Quintero (2008) integrated blogging into their ESL college writing classes in Turkey and Colombia. They found that providing feedback via a blogging platform was enjoyable to the students and improved their writing skills. Ene and Upton (2018) used a similar approach with a group of L2 international students in the United States from six different countries. They provided asynchronous feedback and a chat feature while students drafted their papers on a shared platform and found that students were more successful at correcting their writing errors. In a study of Vietnamese post-secondary ESL learners, computer-moderated feedback was more effective at improving students' writing, but students preferred face-to-face interactions with their faculty (Pham, 2022).

Peer feedback was another common area of research for L2 English language learners and L2 international students, as it benefited both the students as both writers and reviewers (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021; Farrah, 2012; Haider, 2012; Ho, 2015; Ho et al., 2020; Hoomanfard, 2017; Kitjaroonchai, 2022; Kurt & Atay, 2007; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Tai et al., 2015). The results from several studies demonstrated that putting L2 English language learners into peer

groups for feedback contributed to improved writing abilities in an environment that students enjoyed more than other forms of feedback (Ho et al., 2020; Hoomanfard, 2017; Kitjaroonchai, 2022; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Son, 2022). Son (2022) demonstrated that the students learned about group dynamics and how to leverage the group to become active learners. In addition to better writing capabilities, this strategy reduced anxiety and improved attitudes about writing (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021; Farrah, 2012; Kurt & Atay, 2007). Ho (2015) combined peer group feedback with computer-moderated feedback technology with a group of Taiwanese ESL learners and found that using the two modalities together resulted in more revision-oriented comments from their peers. Caution on this form of feedback, however, was that although it was successful and enjoyable, students needed to be trained to provide feedback so as not to confuse or frustrate their peers (Tai et al., 2015). In addition, for L2 international students put into peer groups with native English speakers, there was evidence that if the correct expectations were not set relative to the goal of the group (i.e., supportive feedback for incremental improvement and an opportunity for a globalized context of the subject matter), L2 international students can feel marginalized (Mazanderani et al., 2022).

The differences in feedback instructors provided to their students may have been related to the type of students they were teaching. Ferris (2010) reviewed eight English writing corrective feedback studies and distinguished between instructors of students learning a second language commonly used in their home country and students learning a foreign language not widely used by others in their community. Foreign language instructors had a comprehensive perspective on their feedback, whereas second language instructors focused mainly on language use. This difference in feedback likely impacted the students' breadth of English writing learning (Ferris, 2010). In addition, Hajeid (2018) acknowledged that there were many ways to provide

the right kind of feedback in writing effectively, depending on the learning stage the instructor found their learner.

Formal English writing centers at universities also played an important role for L2 English language learners. Eckstein (2018) reported that L2 international students were most likely to use writing centers to get feedback on their language use (grammar), which was unlike how these centers were used by native English speakers and second-language United States residents. Eckstein (2018) also acknowledged that L2 international students did not always know what feedback they needed and encouraged writing centers to be proactively comprehensive in their support. Scott (2021) discussed the importance of ensuring a university's writing center was designed to fully support L2 international students with a holistic writing approach, maintaining a positive attitude, and training staff to avoid deficit-intensive feedback.

In summary, the research on English writing coaching and feedback for L2 English language learners and L2 international students illuminated that the act of coaching was essential and valuable but that the methods, norms, attitudes, and outcomes around feedback were variable (e.g., Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019; Faraj, 2015; McMartin-Miller, 2014). Nassaji and Kartchava (2017) concluded that feedback to L2 writers, in any form, was only valuable if the student recognized it and knew how to process it. It is critical to remember that L2 English language learners and L2 international students come from many different countries, and the variability of the data coming out of the research reviewed here, coming from many different countries, represents the diversity that faculty and administrators should expect from students coming to the United States to study. For example, there is variability in how much English writing feedback and coaching students want and how they want it (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; McMartin-Miller, 2014). There is also variability in how much English writing coaching

and feedback instructors provide and how they offer it (e.g., Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Faraj, 2015). This will ultimately result in considerable variability in the English writing skills we see in the L2 international students who arrive in the United States.

English Writing Motivation

The last component of research about how L2 English language learners and L2 international students learn and develop English writing skills is the scholarship on how motivation plays a role in supporting or hindering their education. Researchers have long reported that the most successful L2 language learners were those with positive attitudes who were strongly motivated to learn (Gardner, 1968). They also demonstrated that a strong motivation to learn and improve English writing skills was positively correlated with improved English writing proficiency and writing performance (Limeranto & Mbato, 2022; Sun & Wang, 2020). Similarly, students in multiple studies admitted that low motivation resulted in increased writing difficulties with learning and retaining the conventions of English writing (Irzawati et al., 2021; Toba et al., 2019.)

The degree to which L2 English language learners understand the importance of English writing skills was inconsistent across studies. Several researchers suggested that students knew the value of learning English writing skills (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Chou, 2011; Fitriani & Sabarniati, 2021; Jabali, 2018). Indonesian students enrolled in an English critical essay writing course indicated they understood the importance of writing well (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Similarly, two studies of graduate-level L2 English language learners from Taiwan and Palestine uniformly believed that English writing was a vital skill to learn for their careers (Chou, 2021; Jabali, 2018). Finally, 100% of Indonesian college students interviewed in a study acknowledged their motivation to learn English writing skills (Fitriani & Sabarniati, 2021). As Dörnyei (2003)

pointed out, teachers play an important role in educating students on the importance of learning English writing skills.

Alternatively, another body of research indicated that L2 English language learners did not understand the importance of learning English writing skills, which could have led to a low or nonexistent motivation to develop those skills (Akhtar et al., 2019; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). In Malaysia, half of the ESL learners in a research study lacked the belief that English writing was important (Ahktar et al., 2019). Faculty of an ESL writing program in Iran reported that the reluctance they saw in their students to write in English was due to the belief that they would not have a future need for the skill (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013). Similarly, in Ethiopia, students reported the same reason for writing reluctance (Melketo & Tessema, 2012). Finally, ESL students in Nigeria failed to make the connection between learning English writing skills and their ability to write effective documents, gain employment, and achieve more at work (Okpe & Onjewu, 2017).

There are reasons why students may not believe that English writing skills are important. There is evidence that faculty have not always prioritized or have de-emphasized the importance of English writing skills relative to reading, listening, and speaking (Altinmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019). Altinmakas and Bayyurt (2019) reported that the syllabi in an English department in Turkey did not include teaching writing skills. Although there was a range of interest in writing by the faculty, the priority was always reading, writing, and listening, which they saw as the most critical skills for knowledge transfer. Other researchers reported that in classwork in Indonesia and Turkey with English writing assignments, faculty provided feedback on the writing content but not on the mechanical errors of the students' writing (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019). Riazantseva (2012) demonstrated that families

in Russia supported this bias, focused their children's learning on reading and speaking, and were less concerned about writing.

Peirce (1995) introduced the idea that there is an impact on learning for L2 English language learners when there is a power differential between the learner and the target culture or target language native speakers. Darvin and Norton (2023) discussed the concept of the investment to learn English and English writing as a socially constructed component of motivation. For example, if an L2 English learner believed they will be marginalized or not even seen as a legitimate English language user, they may be less invested in putting the energy into learning the skills.

The research on the motivation to learn English writing skills is consistent with the results showing the connection between having high motivation for learning and learning success. Acquiring the motivation, however, looks inconsistent for some students and may be a barrier to developing strong English writing skills before coming to the United States for continued education.

Pre-Arrival Acculturation

As discussed earlier, acculturation is the "dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005, p. 698). There was a significant amount of acculturation research relative to international students. This research focused on those activities that international students should undertake to adjust to their personal and academic life in a new country and avoid homesickness, depression, and anxiety (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Researchers in this area recommended strategies such as academic socialization, support from the university, social relationships, counseling, developing help-seeking behaviors, and cultural integration

(Acker & Hague, 2015; Bastien et al., 2018; Li & Middlemiss, 2022; Luo et al., 2019; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Xu, 2019). Relative to this study, however, I was interested in the state of international students when they arrived in the United States, academically in particular. As such, I reviewed the scant literature on the social and academic pre-acculturation of international students, referring to

> the changes experienced by a potential migrant after making the decision to emigrate, having contact (indirectly or directly) with the society of immigration, and starting preparations for the upcoming migration. This active process also includes the potential migrant's adaptation to such changes prior to migration (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijala, 2011, p. 500).

Social Pre-Acculturation

Most scholarship available for international students' pre-acculturation revolved around their social adjustment to a new culture. Xu (2019) reported that successful student transitions involved students who prepared for life in their new home by first researching the country's culture, such as exploring both the positive and negative aspects, to reduce unexpected anxiety on arrival. They also obtained as much pre-travel experience as possible, such as studying language colloquialisms, cultural norms, and public transportation systems. Similarly, Yusuff (2021) reported that by learning as much about the new culture as possible, students improved their ability to adjust, made them more self-confident, and reduced the culture shock that others with less preparation felt.

The internet positively influenced the pre-acculturation process for international students (Socolov et al., 2017). Before arrival, students successful in their transition used the internet to

reduce geographic distance, exchanged cultural information, and simultaneously shared their activities with families and friends, which had a positive impact once they had left.

In a pilot study to develop a tool for measuring pre-acculturation activities, Brown et al. (2011) described how positive anticipation around the move resulted in better engagement and affiliation with the new country the individuals entered. Ji (2020) reported how universities had facilitated pre-acculturation by trying to find out student needs before they arrived, but only in personal aspects, including housing, roommates, and meal preferences. While this research all referenced social aspects of pre-acculturation, the activities could also apply to academic elements.

Academic Pre-Acculturation

Very little research existed specifically on academic pre-acculturation activities by international students. Xu (2019) described how previous experience with short-term exchange programs at Western universities helped prepare Chinese international students for long-term educational programs abroad, particularly related to pedagogical styles that differed from their home institutions. In another study describing all aspects of pre-arrival acculturation exercised by L2 international students and the influence they had on the students' success, Bastien et al. (2018) reported that English proficiency was the strongest predictor of academic success. However, this correlation was inconsistent. There were studies that support English proficiency exam scores as predictors for academic success (Rose et al., 2020; Xie & Curle, 2022), and those that did not (Curle et al., 2020; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015). It was interesting to note that cultural distance, defined as the similarity of cultures, was not a predictor of academic success. The researchers speculated that this could be because culture was measured by its social aspect and not the educational norms that varied between countries discussed elsewhere in this literature

review. This paucity of data on academic pre-acculturation provides an opportunity for this research to add significant value.

Situating the Study in the Literature

In this literature review, I summarized the challenges that L2 English language learners and L2 international students faced with their English writing. These challenges could be academic and cultural. Students struggled with language use, vocabulary, and mechanics (e.g., Akhtar et al., 2019; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Singh, 2019). They did not always understand the educational norms, which may have been different from their home cultures, and they often experienced anxiety, a reluctance to write, and other feelings of insecurity that became barriers to their success (e.g., Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Iermolenko et al., 2021).

I next reviewed the four components of learning and reinforcing English writing skills aligned with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Deri, 2022; O'Rorke, 2006). These included early education, practice, receiving feedback, and motivation. In all four categories, the research demonstrated that L2 English language learners and L2 international students had the opportunity to engage in the behavior for successful learning. However, there was significant variability in these behaviors, and barriers often prevented them from engaging successfully. Students learned English writing for many years in primary and secondary school, but for various reasons, education often left them with only basic writing skills (e.g., Altinmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Irzawati et al., 2021). Students and faculty understood the value of practicing English writing skills, but often, students reported that they did not practice enough or were not given the opportunity (e.g., Fitriani & Sabarniati, 2021; Rahmat et al., 2022). There was clear evidence that feedback effectively improved writing skills, but there were often gaps in the feedback students needed (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Ravichandran et al., 2017). Finally, there was

significant variability in the student's motivation for learning and developing English writing skills (e.g., Okpe & Onjewu, 2017; Jabali, 2018).

In the last section of this literature review, I discussed the scholarship on the pre-acculturation of international students, particularly around the academic aspects of their pre-arrival behaviors. Very few research studies existed in this area. However, the available data suggested that students who prepared for their new social and academic environments were more likely to be successful (e.g., Bastien et al., 2018; Xu, 2019). My research complements this existing research by looking holistically at L2 international students and exploring how their previous education and personal experiences prepared them for English writing in the United States. I evaluated how their early education, practice, feedback as they learned to write, and personal motivation prepared them for English writing in the United States, as well as the activities they engaged in to prepare for their continued education there. From there, I explored the challenges they experienced with English writing after they arrived in the United States to tell the story of the degree to which their experience and preparation resulted in success.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative holistic multiple-case study was to examine how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. In this chapter, I will explain how I conducted this study. After reviewing my philosophical approach to this study, I will describe the research design and methods. This will include details on how I recruited participants, collected and analyzed data, ensured data trustworthiness and authenticity, and protected human subjects.

Research Perspective

A theoretical perspective is the lens through which we view our research (Bhattacharya, 2017). It "offers us some way to organize our thoughts, lay out our assumptions and beliefs, and logically defend the organizing patterns through which we might want to explore" our topic of interest (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 6). As I designed, implemented, and analyzed this research project, I undoubtedly processed my thoughts, data, and interpretations with a pragmatic worldview (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Based on the theoretical framework upon which I constructed this research, I believe that the English writing challenges of L2 English learners and L2 international graduate students stemmed from their educational experiences and preparation activities. I looked at this phenomenon as a problem arising from "actions, situations, and consequences" (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 10). I aimed to seek as much knowledge as possible about this problem to find potential solutions. I chose a multi-case study research design because I wanted to use as many data sources as possible to find the most understanding and the best possible answers to my research questions, another hallmark of a pragmatist (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Positionality Statement

When conducting research involving human participants, federal regulations are in place to ensure participants are protected, and an Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversees those protections (Protection of Human Subjects, 2018). Beyond the protections required by law, I was compelled to maximize the integrity and benefit of my research. Therefore, bias must be recognized and addressed during all phases of the research process. One source of bias comes from the personal and social characteristics of the researcher (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997).

My personal and social characteristics influence my perceptions of research and scholarship, and I recognize many factors in my biographical sketch that could play a role. I am a white, gay, cisgender, 53-year-old, introverted male. I am the youngest of eight children from a working-class, Catholic, military, two-parent household in an exclusively white Minnesota suburb. I am a first-generation college graduate with two science degrees and over twenty-five years of clinical research leadership experience. I am once divorced, happily married, and the adoptive father of three twenty-something daughters. My daughters, all having come from the foster care system, live with varying degrees of special needs, from significant developmental disabilities to moderate mental health issues, all having impacted their educational journeys. I live an upper-middle-class lifestyle, have traveled extensively, and strongly value charity. As described by Hamby (2018), some of my personal and social characteristics confer power and privilege, such as being white, male, and college-educated. Conversely, some may confer marginalization and disadvantage, such as being gay, introverted, and the parent of a disabled child. Personal awareness of these characteristics is essential, particularly concerning how they influence my opinions, how I see the world, and how I might design, execute, analyze, and interpret research.

In this research project, I was particularly cognizant of the position of power and privilege relative to my study participants and the population I intended to serve with these results. There was a power dynamic in the relationship with my research participants as I was their professor and a faculty member in their graduate program. Even with the consent form assurances that they were free to speak openly and honestly without worry of negative consequences, there were still risks these participants may have felt. I knew they may have wanted to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, compliment me on my teaching abilities, or remind me what good students they were. They may have been concerned about uncomfortable future interactions, assignments, or grades. This, in particular, I took into account when analyzing the data. There were also several other power differentials, such as my whiteness, education, life experience, nationality, and citizenship. I attempted to reflect on those characteristics to acknowledge and minimize the bias they brought to this research as I collected, analyzed, and reported on the data I collected. These concerns supported a study design that included data collection from many sources. Triangulation of data helped support the conclusions I might have questioned had they been solely based on my discussions with the participants.

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative holistic multiple-case study was to examine how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggests that to learn a behavior, such as English writing, the learner must receive effective knowledge transfer, opportunity to practice, constructive feedback, and the motivation to acquire the behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Deri, 2022; O'Rorke, 2006). Although L2 international

students have the opportunity to learn English writing before coming to the United States (Cheney et al., 2005), they traditionally struggle in this area after arriving (e.g., Akhtar et al., 2019; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Riazantseva, 2012). Using a holistic multiple-case study approach for this investigation, I aimed to explore this phenomenon guided by the following questions:

- How did L2 international graduate students' previous English writing education experiences help prepare them for English writing in the United States?
- What pre-acculturation activities did L2 international graduate students engage in relative to English writing before coming to the United States?
- How did the L2 international students' pre-arrival education and pre-acculturation activities influence their English writing experiences after arriving in the United States for graduate school?

Multiple-Case Study Methodology

I leveraged a descriptive and explanatory holistic multiple-case study for this investigation. A researcher uses a descriptive case study to examine a real-life case in the context in which it occurs and an explanatory case study to explain the cause and effect of a phenomenon too complex for a simple survey or experiment (Hancock et al., 2021; Yin, 2014). Case studies were an appropriate methodology for this research topic, as they are used to investigate, understand, and discover causal links of a phenomenon, such as the relationship between English writing experiences, English writing preparedness, and English writing success (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Duff, 2012; Hays, 2004; Yin, 2014). A cornerstone of case study research is utilizing multiple data sources, increasing data credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). This aligned well with my research questions and my access to data. I had several data sources for each case and each research question, including personal interviews with students and college

administrative staff, previous college website data, writing samples, letters of recommendation, and English equivalency test scores.

I chose a multi-case design over a single-case design to strengthen my study results. A single case study may be idiosyncratic; however, results are more generalizable when based on several evaluations of the same phenomenon, as in a multiple-case study (Hays, 2004). Yin (2014) describes this as "cross-case conclusions" (p. 60). There are two different types of multi-case study designs. An embedded multi-case design includes multiple cases within the same situational context (e.g., following three siblings through the same primary school, high school, and college; Yin, 2014). A holistic case implies that the case and all the data for the case have a unique context. A holistic multi-case design, which I used in this study, requires that each of the cases and all of the data for each case have a unique context. A holistic multiple-case study design was appropriate for this research project because each participant's (case's) experiences occurred in a different context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). Specifically, for this study, each student came from different families living in different communities. They also had different primary, secondary, and post-secondary educational experiences. In addition, they had different personal and academic characteristics with corresponding English writing competency challenges.

Baxter and Jack (2008) and Hays (2004) warn that it is critical to set boundaries for multiple-case studies prospectively. Boundary-setting includes defining the case, the unit of analysis, and the data collection timeframe. I set the boundaries for this study prospectively. I defined a case as an individual and all their English academic writing experiences before and after coming to a particular United States university as an L2 international graduate student. My unit of analysis was 13 students. I collected and analyzed data over 18 weeks; however, the data

collection timeframe began when each participant began learning their English writing skills and ended mainly at the close of their interview.

Research Methods

In this section, I will review the specific methods I used to collect and analyze the data for this study. I will discuss the site where I recruited and enrolled all study participants. I will provide a detailed overview of the data collection and analysis techniques. Finally, I will discuss the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data and analyses and the steps I took to ensure that the welfare and rights of my participants were protected through the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice.

Recruitment and Selection

Site

All participants were L2 international students attending graduate school at a single site, Santa Carla State University (SCSU; a pseudonym), in a rural community in the Midwestern United States. Founded in 1869 as a normal school, SCSU is a regional comprehensive university with 200 undergraduate, 51 master's, and three doctoral programs (SCSU, n.d.-a). The population of SCSU is over 10,000 students, with 56% female and 19% students of color. The university holds most national accreditations across eight colleges and schools (SCSU, n.d.-b). SCSU hosts over 1,200 international students from nearly 100 countries (SCSU, n.d.-c). The participants were recruited from students previously enrolled in a graduate-level communications class, "Communication for MedTech Professionals," located at a satellite campus of SCSU in a metropolitan area approximately one hour away from SCSU's main campus.

Case Participants

I employed purposeful sampling for this study to ensure I engaged case participants who experienced the phenomena under investigation (Jones et al., 2022). I recruited candidates for the study by emailing all international students who had taken the "Communications for MedTech Professionals" class within the past three years, as these were students for whom I still had a high likelihood of reaching. They would also have a more recent or current memory of their graduate school experiences. In that initial recruitment email, I gave them a high-level description of the research study, explained what would be involved if they chose to participate, and provided the inclusion criteria: 1) You were a former student of "Communication for MedTech Professionals," 2) English was not your native language, 3) You studied English in college or went to an English-speaking college outside the US, and 4) The only university in the United States you studied at was SCSU. I also posted a recruitment flyer with the same inclusion criteria on the campus where the potential participants would likely pass by.

With these criteria, the participants in the study would be L2 English learners who had the opportunity to develop their English writing skills before coming to the United States, and they were new to the United States education system when they enrolled in the "Communications for MedTech Professionals" course. As a student in the "Communication for MedTech Professionals" course, of which I was the professor, I had writing samples to evaluate their English writing early in their United States education experience, and after a semester of consistent English writing education and writing assignment feedback. They were also offered a $25 gift card for participating in the research.

To the 18 students who responded to my recruitment email, I sent a screening email with the following questions: 1) In what country(ies) did you spend your childhood (i.e., during your

primary and secondary education? 2) What is your native language (the language spoken most often in your home as a child)? 3) In what language was your primary and secondary education taught? 4) In what country(ies) did you attend your post-secondary education (i.e., college)? 5) In what language was your post-secondary education (i.e., college) taught? 6) Have you attended any other universities in the United States other than SCSU? With these questions, I confirmed that they grew up outside of the United States, and I reconfirmed that the participants were L2 English learners who went to English-medium schools, they had the opportunity to develop their English writing skills before coming to the United States, and they were new to the United States education system.

Sixteen students responded to the screening email, and 13 met the inclusion criteria. One student never attended an English-medium school before coming to the United States, and two students went to other institutions outside their home countries before coming to SCSU. I sent the 13 students who met the inclusion criteria an informed consent form. All 13 replied to me and set up a time for their virtual interview. In multiple-case studies, deciding the number of cases is based on discretionary judgment, not a formula (Yin, 2014). Case numbers in multiple-case studies range from two to 12 and are based on the complexity of the cases and the degree to which the replications support the cross-case conclusions (Yin, 2014). The initial sample size starts with predicting the expected variability in both the contexts and the data across the cases (Yin, 2014). My literature review on L2 English language learners and my personal experience caused me to hypothesize a mild to moderate variability in the participants' English writing experiences, with most students having significant English writing challenges and limited English writing preparedness. I had initially planned on at least eight participants with increased replications if I felt I needed to strengthen my cross-case conclusions because of high data

variability (Yin, 2014). With a case count of 13, I felt confident in the number of case replications I had in place for my study.

Before the interview, I emailed the participants the informed consent form, informing them that I wanted them to choose pseudonyms and a graphic image to represent them, protect their identities, and encourage candor. I told them I would use these when I created written reports and visual presentations and that I would choose a name or image for them if they did not have a suggestion or a preference. I also asked them to review and return their signed informed consent form to me or to wait until our interview if they had any questions. At the time of the virtual interview, before I started recording our discussion, I reviewed the full scope and purpose of the study with the case participants. I explained that they would be an individual case in this study, answered any questions, and asked them to email their signed informed consent form if they had not sent it to me already. Case study research can be very personal, and discussing academic challenges can feel vulnerable, so rapport-building and empathy were essential. I explained that this was a collaborative effort and reminded them of the purpose and implications of the study, which was to examine how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. I advised the participants that I was recording and transcribing their interviews and would share the transcriptions and summary of their stories for their review, edits, and comments (i.e., member checking; Hancock et al., 2021; Stake, 1995). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Data Collection

In case study research, participant interviews are the principal source of data; however, a significant strength and distinguishing feature of this methodology is having multiple data

sources for triangulation and credibility of findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hays, 2004; Yin, 2014). The key is to seek answers to the research questions from different data sources. Case study researchers can use documents, interviews, and direct observations and should support their findings with multiple data sources (Hays, 2004; Yin, 2014). In this research study, three data sources informed the assembly of the individual cases (L2 international student interviews, home institution documentation, and writing samples), and one data source supported the results of the cross-case conclusions (SCSU employee interviews).

L2 International Student Interviews

This study's primary data source was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the 13 case study participants. Details on these participants are in Chapter 4. Via Zoom, I conducted and recorded virtual one-on-one discussions with each participant. First, I asked questions to explore the participants' primary and secondary educational backgrounds and experiences with English writing before coming to the United States. I wanted to understand how their early education and English writing instruction in their home countries prepared them to write in the United States with questions such as "What priority did your primary and secondary school teachers put on writing compared to reading, speaking, and listening?" and "In primary and secondary school, tell me about what you learned about English writing language use, such as verb tenses, prepositions, articles, and pronouns?". I also asked questions about their motivation for learning and developing English writing skills before coming to the United States and how they prepared for English writing before coming to the United States for their graduate studies. Finally, I asked them about their English writing success in the United States and the most challenging component of English writing they experienced during their studies. Appendix A provides the interview protocol that drove the discussion.

The interview sessions took between 60 and 90 minutes for each participant. Once I was done asking questions and requesting supporting documentation (see sections ***Home Institution Documentation*** and ***Writing Samples***), I reminded the participants that I would be reviewing and editing the transcription of the Zoom recording and that I might contact them to clarify their responses or ask one or more follow-up questions. I also reminded them that I would send them our interview transcription for their review. At the end of the interview, I confirmed their choice of pseudonym, graphic image, and address to which I could send their gift card.

After thoroughly reviewing and editing the transcriptions of the Zoom interviews, I sent the documents to each participant, offering them the opportunity to review, verify, and correct their content. Six participants responded and confirmed the accuracy of the transcript, and one participant responded with minor corrections to their content. I followed up with one email to all participants, asking them their age at the time of our interview. I mailed all participants a $25 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time.

Home Institution Documentation

Another data source for this holistic multiple-case study was documentation from the participants' home institutions and faculty. During the interview, I explained to the participants the concept of case study research and my desire to support the results I would draw from my case study interviews with other data sources. I told them I wanted to ask them for additional documents they may or may not have access to. I explained that this portion of their participation was entirely voluntary and that I would send them a follow-up email after I explained what I was looking for. They could send me whatever they were willing and able to provide me. I also explained that I did not want them to send me anything until after they received their gift card

from me. I did not want them to feel their appreciation gift was contingent upon them sending me additional private information.

I asked the participants to provide, if they had access to them, any course syllabi or writing assignments they may have retained from their past undergraduate and graduate courses. Only three of the participants provided me with course syllabi information, but 11 of the participants sent me electronic copies of their senior thesis or the equivalent of a culminating writing project from their college experience in their home country. I documented the name of the university they attended in their home country and confirmed that I could find the website for the institution. I also asked for some of the names of the participants' college professors. I explained that I would not contact them but would review their online information on the content they taught or the expectations in their courses. Eleven participants sent me 3-7 names of professors that instructed them in college. Finally, I requested that the participants provide me with their college transcripts and any letters of recommendation they had received from professors for their graduate school applications. All 13 participants sent me their college transcripts and at least one letter of recommendation. A summary of all case participant data is in Table 2.

Table 2

Data Summary by Case Participant

Name[a]	Interview	Writing Samples[b]	Exam[c]	CT[d]	LOR[e]	Names[f]	Course Info[g]
Akira	X	4	X	X	3	4	2
Bea	X	3	X	X	4	11	-
Bob	X	3	X	X	2	3	1
Elsa	X	4	X	X	3	6	-
Omari	X	4	X	X	3	4	-
Maya	X	4	X	X	3	16	-
Samyuthka	X	4	X	X	3	3	-
Sarah	X	3	X	X	2	5	-
Uno	X	5	X	X	5	5	-
Vee	X	4	X	X	3	1	-
Vidz	X	4	X	X	3	5	-
Vinni	X	4	-	X	1	-	-
Zuri	X	4	X	X	3	2	-

[a] Pseudonyms chosen by the participants

[b] Number of writing samples, includes home institution college writing projects, graduate school writing sample submissions, and writing assignments from the United States communications class

[c] Official English proficiency exam results (IELTS or TOEFL)

[d] Home country college transcripts

[e] Number of letters of recommendation from home country academic references

[f] Number of names of professors from home country college courses

[g] Number of documents describing home country college course curriculum

Writing Samples

The final significant data source for this study was direct writing samples by the participants. Each participant submitted a writing sample as part of their SCSU graduate school application (in the form of a 'Letter of Intent' or 'Statement of Purpose') and the results of an English proficiency test. Providing them with the same voluntary conditions as with the home institution documentation, I asked them if they would send me an electronic version of their graduate school application writing sample and their English proficiency exam results. Twelve participants sent me their English proficiency exam results, and 11 sent me copies of their graduate school application writing samples.

All participants were students in the "Communications for the MedTech Professionals" class for which I was the instructor. I told them I planned to use the first and final drafts of the primary writing assignment from that course as supporting documentation for the study. I explained that it would document their English writing development in that course. A summary of all case participant data is in Table 2.

SCSU Employee Interviews

Additional data came from semi-structured interviews with administrators and personnel from the areas of SCSU who engaged with prospective graduate students through recruitment activities, answered questions about attending SCSU or the application process, processed their applications, or worked with them when they first arrive on campus. I recruited participants from individuals who worked in the graduate and international studies offices. I sent an email stating that I was researching international students' academic writing. I was looking for individuals "who engage with international students at any point during or after their graduate school application process and are interested in and willing to share their experiences." Seven

individuals expressed interest in participating, and five set up virtual meetings and returned their informed consent forms. Table 3 provides high-level information on these individuals.

Table 3

SCSU Employee Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Graphic Image	Gender	Area of Employment	Contact with International Graduate Students
Garren		Male	International Studies	Pre-application, application process, after arrival
John		Male	Graduate Studies	Pre-application, application process, after arrival
Laura		Female	International Studies	Pre-application, application process
Libby		Female	Graduate Academic Program	Pre-application, application process, after arrival
Rhonda		Female	Graduate Studies	Pre-application, application process

Before the interview started, I explained the research and allowed them to ask questions about the study and consent form. I also collected pseudonyms and graphic images from them and told them I would be recording our Zoom discussion. During the interview, I asked them how the university set expectations around English writing skills for prospective L2 international students, such as, “In the application process, to what degree does the university communicate that they expect a certain level of English writing skills?”. I also asked what questions they

received from students about English writing skills relative to other academic requirements, such as, “When the university asks prospective international graduate students to submit writing samples as part of their application process, what questions or concerns do you receive from them?”. Appendix B provides the interview protocol that drove those discussions.

The interview sessions lasted 20 to 45 minutes. At the end of the interview, I told the participants that I would review and edit the Zoom recording transcription and that I might contact them to clarify their responses or ask one or more follow-up questions. I also reminded them that I would send them our interview transcription for their review. At the end of the interview, I confirmed their choice of pseudonym, graphic image, and email address to which I could send a gift card as a token of appreciation. Two participants declined the gift. After thoroughly reviewing and editing the transcriptions of the Zoom interviews, I sent the documents to each participant, offering them the opportunity to review, verify, and correct their content, along with their $25 gift card (to those who accepted). Two participants responded and confirmed the accuracy of the transcript, and one participant responded with minor corrections to their content. One of these participants also sent me a document outlining information she shared with prospective graduate students relative to the graduate school writing sample submission requirement.

Data Analysis

Analytic Strategy

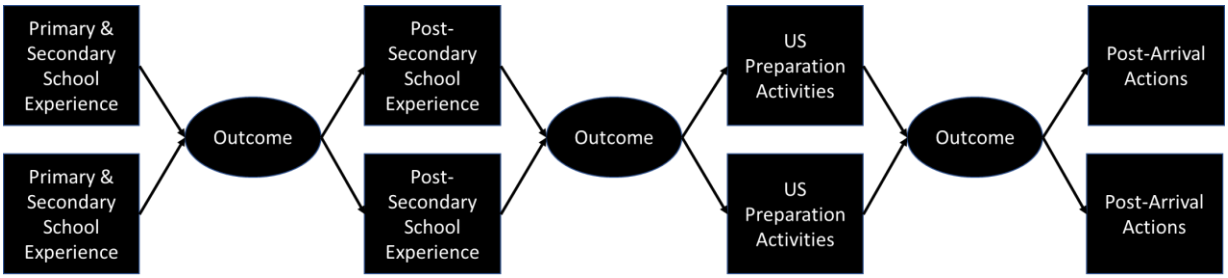
As Yin (2014) suggested, case study data from multiple sources can make it difficult to use any single form of data analysis to answer research questions. Instead, a case study researcher should develop an analytic strategy using “your original research questions, the data, your defensible handling and interpretation of the data, and your ability to state some findings

and draw some conclusions" (Yin, 2014, p. 136). I used an individual-level logic model analytic technique for this study to organize and analyze my data and answer my research questions (Yin, 2014). A logic model technique aligned well with this research because it "operationalizes a complex chain of occurrences or events over an extended period of time" (Yin, 2014, p. 155). Researchers demonstrated the benefits of this model when studying cause-and-effect phenomena to develop programmatic visions and goals (Yin, 2014).

An individual-level logic model organizes data into actions, outcomes, and interventions, with additional data supporting or rejecting the relationships (Yin, 2014). I used the L2 international graduate student interviews as the basis of the logic model and the home institution documentation, writing samples, and SCSU employee interviews to support, reject, or revise the relationships between the actions, outcomes, and interventions relevant to this research (see Figure 1.). The strength of the relationships was the basis of the answers to my research questions. It also helped me consider possible programmatic interventions and process improvement ideas to better support L2 international graduate students with their English writing.

Figure 1

Strategic Logic Model



Interview Data

I copied all Zoom interview transcripts into Word documents, edited them for clarity, and gave the interviewee the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy. For each L2 international graduate student participant, I drafted a short holistic descriptive individual case report (Yin, 2014). These included a brief background on their childhood exposure to English and their early English writing education experience, followed by their experience with English writing while in college in their home countries. I also included each participant's perspective on how they prepared for coming to the United States and their thoughts on their English writing success since arriving. I sent the synopsis to participants for the opportunity to edit as they saw fit.

To organize all the interview data for analysis, I followed the steps suggested by Baxter and Jack (2008), Hays (2004), and Yin (2014). After editing the transcription documents for clarity, I uploaded them to the NVivo 12 Plus qualitative analysis tool. I read through each interview line by line and highlighted any statement that referred to English writing or preparing for college in the United States. I used NVivo 12 Plus to code each statement with a descriptive code. After coding all the interviews, I grouped them into categories and broader themes associated with my research questions and the logic model categories of student actions, interventions, and outcomes (Hays, 2004; Yin, 2014). The strongest themes across cases (i.e., results of the cross-case analysis; Hays, 2004) led to the foundation of my overall findings, research question answers, and study implications. To begin my triangulation of data (Hancock et al., 2021; Stake, 1995), I reviewed the themes from the SCSU employee interviews relative to the case participant interview findings.

Home Institution Documents and Writing Samples

I reviewed the websites of every university the L2 international student participants attended and searched for information on the courses taught by the professors the students identified. I took a screenshot of anything that mentioned English writing or English writing expectations. I uploaded those screenshots to NVivo 12 Plus and the course syllabi information I received, their college writing projects, college transcripts, letters of recommendation, and English proficiency exam results. I also uploaded their graduate school application writing samples and two paper drafts from the "Communications for MedTech Professionals" class.

I used the same coding system as the interviews to review, highlight, and code the uploaded information from the university and professor websites and curriculum material. I also coded the letters of recommendation and the English proficiency exam results. To continue with the triangulation of data (Hancock et al., 2021; Stake, 1995), I evaluated how that additional data strengthened the categories and themes that had emerged from the logic model process. Using a separate NVivo 12 Plus file, I reviewed and coded the writing samples. I reviewed the entire graduate school application writing sample and pages two through five of each additional writing sample I received or had from the "Communications for MedTech Professions Class" (each paper was at least seven pages long). For each writing sample, I documented the number of sentences in the sample and the number of language use, mechanics, or vocabulary errors I could identify. I followed the same corrective process I would follow if I was correcting technical papers in a STEM communications class. This gave me an assessment of their writing skills before and after arriving in the United States and after a semester of directed English writing feedback. I overlaid these data to support or refute my developing results.

When my themes were finalized, and I had developed draft answers to my research questions, I sent a summary of the high-level results to my L2 international student participants. I gave them the opportunity to provide feedback on my results but only received acknowledgment or agreement from them.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

One of the major strengths of a case study, particularly a multiple-case study, is the opportunity for data triangulation (Hays, 2004). For each research question, I had the opportunity to generate comprehensive findings from multiple data sources. The strength of the answer to each question was the degree to which the data sources corroborated each other. In addition, in a holistic multiple-case study, the cases supported and strengthened the overall findings when I found cross-case alignment (Hays, 2004; Yin, 2014), which was common.

One limitation of this study is the relationship between myself (the researcher) and the study participants. Although volunteers, some of the participants were students who were my academic advisees. Hays (2004) warned that case study research could be very personal, and power structures can cause tension and interfere with openness and authenticity. I attempted to minimize this limitation by framing this research as a partnership between myself and the participants. I explained that my primary goal was to become a better mentor for L2 international graduate students as they worked on their writing skills, so their candor was extremely valuable. I also ensured that no potential participant was a student in one of my classes while participating in the study.

To facilitate candor and honor the information the participants shared with me, I included anonymity and confidentiality during the analysis and reporting of the study results. I informed my participants that I would remove any identifying information they may inadvertently share

during the interviews. However, I gave them the opportunity to humanize themselves by choosing pseudonyms and graphic images for any papers, reports, or presentations I might give. Finally, I engaged in member checking (Hancock et al., 2021; Stake, 1995) multiple times by sharing the transcription of their interview, a descriptive summary of their story, and a summary of the study themes for corrections and feedback.

Human Subject Protection

There is an ethical responsibility when conducting research using human subjects. The researcher's responsibility is to consider the rights and well-being of the participants in a research study. This research project involving human subjects complied with the United States Code of Federal Regulations for protecting human subjects (Protection of Human Subjects, 2018) and the requirements set forth by the SCSU Institutional Review Board (SCSU, n.d.-e). As such, SCSU's Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved this study before its initiation. The scope of the review and approval included the study protocol, the interview questions, the two informed consent forms, and the two recruitment emails I used. The purpose of the review was to ensure that the risks to all participants were minimized relative to the benefits, that adequate informed consent was obtained from each participant, and that the privacy of all participants was maintained. I received IRB approval to conduct this study on May 16, 2023. Appendix C contains a copy of the original approval letter from the SCSU Institutional Review Board.

As part of the informed consent process, I told all participants about their role in this study and their expected participation duration. I described the risks and benefits they could expect from their participation and the degree to which I would keep the personal information they share with me private, anonymous, and confidential. I also informed them that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue participation at any time and did not

need to answer any question they did not wish to. I clarified that their decision to discontinue participation or not answer a particular question during the interview would not affect their relationship with me or the university or interfere with their receipt of the appreciatory gift card. Finally, I provided them with all of my contact information so they could reach out with any questions or concerns about the study or to read the study's results once it is complete. I also obtained their permission to use de-identified transcriptions of their interviews in future presentations and reports, but informed them that their personal identifiable information would be destroyed once the data analysis was finalized.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a detailed description of how I conducted this study. I reviewed my philosophical approach to this study and described the research design and methods. I included details on how I recruited participants, collected and analyzed data, ensured data trustworthiness and authenticity, and protected the human subjects who volunteered to participate in this study.

Chapter 4

Findings

This study aimed to examine how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. I wanted to understand more about the cause and effect of this phenomenon to provide insight into better preparing L2international graduate students for English writing before they arrive in the United States for further education and how better to support them with their English writing challenges after arriving. I conducted this research with a focus on these three overarching research questions:

- How did L2 international graduate students' previous English writing education experience help prepare them for English writing in the United States?
- What pre-acculturation activities did L2 international graduate students engage in relative to English writing before coming to the United States?
- How did the L2 international students' pre-arrival education and pre-acculturation activities influence their English writing experiences after arriving in the United States for graduate school?

To answer these questions, I conducted a holistic multi-case study with L2 international students who came to the United States for graduate school as individual cases. I had in-depth discussions with these students about their experiences with English writing. I collected data from several other sources to build and support the framework of my research findings. Collectively, I used these multiple data sources to answer my research questions and generate meaningful and pragmatic implications from this research.

Chapter four begins with a summary of the methods used to collect and analyze the data in this study. This is followed by a description of the L2 international graduate student participants who volunteered to be cases in this multi-case research study. I will then present the findings of this study in the form of themes, organized by the research questions that drove the design of this project. The themes are categorized by English writing education experiences, pre-acculturation activities, post-arrival English writing success, and ongoing English writing development.

Summary of Methods

As is the hallmark of case studies, data for this research came from several sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hancock et al., 2021; Yin, 2014). The primary data source was semi-structured, in-depth interviews with each case participant, an L2 international graduate student at a four-year college in the Midwestern United States. Additional data came from semi-structured interviews with a group of employees from that university who engaged with international students before and after they applied and began their graduate studies. Other data sources were documents from the participants, including writing samples, transcripts, English proficiency test results, letters of recommendation, and online documentation from the participants' home institutions of higher education that provided insight into the content of the course curriculum. I also had multiple writing assignments these students had submitted in a communications class they took in the United States within the past two years.

I transcribed all interviews into Word documents and created short holistic descriptive individual case reports for each L2 international graduate student participant. I uploaded interview transcriptions, writing samples, letters of recommendation, webpage screenshots, course syllabi information, college transcripts, and English proficiency test results into the

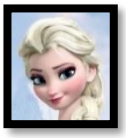
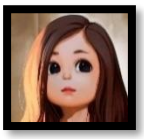
NVivo 12 Plus qualitative data analysis software. I used an individual-level logic model analytic technique for this study to organize and analyze my data and answer my research questions (Yin, 2014). This analytic model focused on the actions, interventions, and outcomes related to these students and their English writing (Yin, 2014). I dissected the statements from the participant and university personnel interviews and coded them with unique descriptive codes focused on actions, interventions, and outcomes. I combined codes into categories and categories into themes. I used the strongest themes, those with consistent support within and between cases, to begin generating findings and answers to my research questions. The additional data sources were used to support or refute the developing results (Duff, 2012; Yin, 2014). The themes emerged in four areas: English writing education experiences, pre-acculturation activities, post-arrival English writing success, and ongoing English writing development.

Participants

The primary participants in the study and the center of each case in this holistic multi-case study were 13 L2 international graduate students, ten women and three men. These were students for whom English was not their first language. However, they went to English-medium primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools outside the United States and had only attended one university in the United States. The following section describes each participant. Their description includes a brief background on their childhood exposure to English and their early English writing education experience, followed by their experience with English writing while in college in their home countries. I also included each participant's perspective on how they prepared for coming to the United States and their thoughts on their English writing success since arriving. Table 4 provides a brief overview of the student participants with their demographic information.

Table 4

L2 International Student Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Graphic Image	Age	Gender	First Language	Home Country	Education
Akira		25	Female	Telugu	India	Pharmacy
Bea		43	Female	Igbo	Nigeria	Dentistry
Bob		24	Male	Telugu	India	Pharmacy
Elsa		26	Female	Telugu	India	Dentistry
Omari		25	Male	Telugu	India	Pharmacy
Maya		29	Female	Nepali	Nepal	Biomedical Engineering
Samyuthka		26	Female	Telugu	India	Pharmacy
Sarah		32	Female	Urdu	India	Pharmacy
Uno		25	Female	Telugu	India	Pharmacy

Name (Pseudonym)	Graphic Image	Age	Gender	First Language	Home Country	Education
Vee		27	Male	Telugu	India	Pharmacy
Vidz		31	Female	Gujarati	India	Medicine
Vinni		24	Female	Telugu	India	Pharmacy
Zuri		24	Female	Hindi/Telugu	India	Pharmacy

Akira

Akira was a 25-year-old woman from India in the second year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Telugu, and she received a doctoral degree in Pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Akira attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing, and was taught by teachers whose first language was not English. She did not speak English at home and only occasionally spoke English with friends outside of the school environment. Going into her post-secondary education, Akira believed that her primary and secondary education prepared her sufficiently for her English and English writing needs in college.

From her secondary education, Akira went directly into pharmacy school. In pharmacy school, Akira was not required to take any English or English writing classes, and the only writing assignment she was given was a research project her university required her to write up in her fifth year. That was the first time Akira learned about citing references and plagiarism. She

received the most valuable feedback from her peers for that writing assignment, as she believed that the professors' English skills were not better than hers. For the rest of her coursework, the faculty was primarily concerned with her learning the content of the classes, and she can only remember one instructor ever giving her feedback on incorrect grammar or writing inaccuracies. For the rest of her instructors, as long as they could understand her responses, her writing skills were not graded.

During the end of her fifth year of pharmacy school, Akira decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education. She did not consider English writing a critical skill when she made that decision. She was much more concerned about polishing her speaking skills. She remembered that someone might have asked her about her confidence in English writing during one of her graduate school admissions interviews. However, she did not note the question as important, and she never saw anything during her graduate school research process that emphasized writing. When taking her English proficiency exam, Akira admitted that she did poorly on the writing portion. She studied for the exam beforehand but focused on learning more English vocabulary.

At the time of the interview, Akira believed that her English writing skills had improved since coming to the United States. English vocabulary was still a struggle for her, but she leveraged online resources to continue to build her choice of words while writing. She did not use any of the writing support services the university offered, but with the writing she had done while in her master's program, she had gained confidence in writing through practice and feedback, and she enjoyed the process. The group work she was involved in also helped her by allowing her to see how others wrote. Akira did not believe that her writing skills affected her

course grades, but she mentioned that she would have had a much easier time with her assignments if she had come to the United States with better writing skills.

Bea

Bea was a 43-year-old woman from Nigeria in the second year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Igbo, and she received a bachelor's degree in Dentistry from an English-medium university in Nigeria. Bea attended public English-medium primary and secondary schools, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing. She did not speak English at home, as it was not allowed. At school, English was only spoken during class, and if she spoke English with friends outside of class, they would use a grammatically incorrect English dialect she referred to as Pidgin English. Going into her post-secondary education, Bea believed that her primary and secondary education had given her a solid English and English writing foundation for what she needed in college. She clarified, however, that her education was in British English.

From her secondary education, Bea went directly into dental school. In dentistry school, Bea was not required to take any English or English writing classes, and the only writing assignment she was given was a research project her university required her to write up in her final year. Bea took a research class where she first learned about citing references and plagiarism. She had a faculty advisor for that writing assignment but received feedback only on the content of her research, not on her grammar, writing mechanics, or vocabulary use. In her coursework, Bea felt the faculty was concerned only with her demonstrating that she had learned the content of the classes. They would give her full marks if she answered her questions correctly, regardless of grammatical or other writing errors.

Bea was in the United States for eight years with her family before she decided to pursue additional graduate education. It never occurred to her that English writing would be an important part of her graduate school experience. She never came across writing as a necessary competency when researching graduate schools, and it was never brought up during her multiple graduate school admissions interviews. When taking her English proficiency exam, Bea recalled doing relatively well in the writing portion, so she believed she had no reason for concern.

Bea admitted to struggling with writing when she started her graduate program in the United States. She continued to have challenges with understanding the appropriate way to cite references, and structuring her paragraphs continued to be difficult. She also had challenges with her vocabulary and finding the correct words to express her thoughts effectively, leading her to dislike English writing as an activity. Bea used one of the university's writing support services but did not think it was beneficial, as she was only asked to rearrange sentences. However, she believed that she had been consistently improving her English writing since starting her graduate program, primarily because of the writing courses, writing assignments, and the feedback she had received. She believed this had influenced her success with her coursework, as she had received accolades on her writing in her last class. She only wished that she had known that writing was such a priority in graduate school.

Bob

Bob was a 24-year-old man from India in the first year of his STEM master's degree program. His first language was Telugu, and he received a doctoral degree in Pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Bob attended a private English-medium primary and secondary school, where he studied English, including all aspects of English writing, primarily through reading and writing. However, although it was considered an English-medium school,

English was only part of the curriculum, and most other classes were taught in Telugu. They were rewarded with extra playtime to encourage learning English skills when they demonstrated their English competency. Bob believed that his primary and secondary English education prepared him well for the English writing he needed to do in college.

From his secondary education, Bob went directly into pharmacy school. In pharmacy school, Bob was not required to take any English or English writing classes, and even though it was an English-medium university and the instruction was in English, the faculty spoke to the students primarily in Telugu or Hindi. Throughout his college education, he had limited writing assignments and did not recall any grading on his writing. His exams were all in English, but the focus was on content. In addition to some case presentations he had to deliver, the only writing assignment he was involved in was his thesis research project in his sixth year. That was the first time Bob was asked to cite references, which he had to learn about independently, although they did not refer to the term plagiarism. Bob was surprised when his faculty advisor started correcting his grammar and formatting for that writing assignment, as this was not something they had ever focused on previously.

During his fifth year of pharmacy school, Bob decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education. He was not concerned with his English writing skills; he assumed that his current level of knowledge would be sufficient for what he needed. He never came across writing as a necessary competency when researching graduate schools, and nobody ever brought it up to him during graduate school admissions conversations. He also believed that his independent preparation for the English proficiency exam utilizing YouTube videos would augment all areas of his English skills. Although he spent time preparing for the exam's writing

portion, Bob revealed that his writing score was the lowest relative to reading, speaking, and listening.

Since starting his graduate program in the United States, Bob believed that his English writing skills had improved from where he had started. He was initially surprised by the amount of writing assignments and the separate writing courses, but he felt he had benefited from the practice and the face-to-face feedback. Bob wanted to continue working on his English vocabulary, finding synonyms for the words he knew to express his thoughts more effectively. He had not used the university's writing support services but had learned a lot from the group work he was involved in, as he thought his teammates were learning from each other. Bob did not believe his writing skills affected his course grades, but he admitted that his lack of plagiarism knowledge had been a challenge academically. He wished he had known more about it before coming to the United States.

Elsa

Elsa was a 26-year-old woman from India finishing the first year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Telugu, and she received a bachelor's degree in Dentistry and a master's degree in Dental Surgery from an English-medium university in India. Elsa attended a private English-medium primary and secondary school, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing. She remembered participating in spelling bees and essay writing competitions, although she believed her English education focused on reading comprehension and less on writing. She attended a convent school, and some of the teachers were English. She was required to speak English in school, but she did not speak English at home and rarely spoke English with friends outside of the school environment. Elsa believed that

her primary education prepared her well for her English and English writing needs in college. She commented that her English writing education ended once she graduated high school.

From her secondary education, Elsa went directly into dental school, where she was not required to take any English or English writing classes. In her bachelor's program, the professors rarely taught in English. Her writing assignments in dental school were a literature review and a thesis in her master's program. The head of the department worked as her editorial guide. Elsa focused on the content, and her editorial guide corrected her writing. She admitted that she did not learn as much as she could have from that process because her guide made the changes for her, and she did not have the opportunity to reflect on the changes. While working on these projects, Elsa learned about citing references and plagiarism. Her university used software to check for plagiarism, and students taught themselves and each other about the rules of referencing source material in writing. Elsa had a few other writing opportunities in college through presenting papers and posters at national and international conferences, which she enjoyed. For the rest of her coursework, the faculty was primarily concerned with her learning the content of the classes; few focused on correcting writing errors.

Elsa was not concerned about her English writing skills when she decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education. She was much more concerned about speaking and listening, which she had to demonstrate in real-time. With writing, she believed that she would have the time to think through what she needed to write and would be successful. During her graduate school research process, Elsa noticed that several universities had writing support services for international services, so she assumed they would help students whose English skills were insufficient. She did not hear from anyone she talked to in the United States that English writing would be an important skill. However, she brushed up on her writing when she studied

for her English proficiency exam. When taking her English proficiency exam, Elsa scored much higher in listening and comprehension, as those were the components she focused on.

Elsa believed her English writing skills had improved since coming to the United States. She attributed that improvement to courses and assignments that allowed her to practice. Some punctuation and grammar elements still challenged Elsa, but she continued to enjoy writing. She had not used any of the writing support services the university offered but was considering using them in the future and had leveraged the Grammarly application. Elsa did not believe that her writing skills interfered with her success in the program, and she valued the written feedback she had received on her writing. She did not value the group work assigned in her courses, as she believed that her peers were too polite to give honest feedback to each other. She wished she had learned about the Grammarly application in her home country, as she thinks that would have helped her be more prepared when she came to the United States.

Omari

Omari was a 25-year-old man from India finishing the second year of his STEM master's degree program. His first language was Telugu, and he received a doctoral degree in Pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Omari attended private English-medium primary and secondary schools, where he studied English, including all aspects of English writing. He did not believe his teachers had very proficient English skills and, therefore, did not think his English education was of the highest quality. He acknowledged that English was the third language for most community members. His English education focused on reading, with only a slight focus on writing. He did not speak English at home, and although there was a monetary incentive to speak English while on school grounds, only his English teacher spoke to him in

English. He only occasionally spoke English with friends outside of the school environment, and then they would speak Butler English (i.e., a dialect not grammatically correct).

From his secondary education, Omari went directly into pharmacy school. In pharmacy school, Omari was not required to take any English or English writing classes, and the only writing he did was in the last couple of years of his doctoral degree when he and a team of peers wrote a thesis on a research project. That was when Omari learned about citing references and plagiarism. His team received feedback from a faculty advisor for his thesis, but it was primarily on content, not their writing. Omari believed that his professor's writing skills were insufficient to provide that level of feedback. For the rest of his coursework, he could not remember receiving any feedback on writing; the faculty was primarily concerned with students learning the content of their classes. Unless the writing was so poor that the instructor could not understand the response, the students would not get feedback on their writing.

In his last year of pharmacy school, Omari decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education. He had talked to upper classmates who had traveled abroad for school, and they had told him that the three most important things to focus on were communication, writing, and plagiarism. Omari took a formal English proficiency preparation course focusing on the United States education system. In that course, the coach informed Omari that United States institutions valued writing, which would likely be the most challenging part of the test. Although no university he talked to told him that writing was important, he received information from several universities about their writing support services. Even with the preparation class and studying, Omari still struggled with the writing portion of the English proficiency exam.

Omari believed he had poor English writing skills when he started his master's degree in the United States. It affected his grades, and he did not enjoy writing. However, he believed it had improved significantly over one year and developed an affinity for it. Vocabulary choice and punctuation continued to be a challenge for Omari in his writing. He did not use any of the university's writing support services but found that the Grammarly application helped him with grammar and word choice. He felt the assigned group work helped him by giving him the sense of responsibility to write well for his team. He also believed that the feedback he had received on his writing assignments helped him develop his writing skills. He just wished he had been better at writing when he first arrived.

Maya

Maya was a 29-year-old woman from Nepal in the final semester of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Nepali, and she received a bachelor's degree in Biomedical Engineering at an English-medium university in Nepal. Maya attended an English-medium primary school where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing, and was taught by teachers whose first language was not English. Maya clarified that she was taught British English. In her English-medium secondary school, the education focus shifted to math and science, and English was de-emphasized. Going into her post-secondary education, Maya believed that her primary and secondary education prepared her well enough for her English writing needs.

From her secondary education, Maya went into an undergraduate biomedical engineering program where she was not required to take any English or English writing classes. Her coursework was focused on math and science, and the faculty evaluated her work based on whether she was learning the content of the courses. She did not recall getting graded on

grammar or other communication skills. The only writing assignment she was given was a group research project her program required her to write up in her final year. That was the first time Maya learned about citing references and plagiarism, and her professors explained the need to learn about plagiarism rules for journal submissions. Her research team had an advisor who provided feedback primarily on the content of their paper, with very little feedback on their writing. Maya acknowledged that she did not enjoy writing, nor was she interested in improving her writing skills.

Maya decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education because of the potential career opportunities. She had heard from friends that plagiarism was strictly monitored in the United States. However, when she took an online class in preparation for the English proficiency exam, she realized how important her writing and speaking skills would be to her success as an L2 international student. Before that, she had only prepared mentally and emotionally for moving away from her family and to another country. Even with the preparatory course, Maya did not do as well on the writing portion of the English proficiency exam as she had hoped. However, she did not see any reference to writing in her graduate school research, so she was not particularly concerned.

Since coming to the United States, Maya has worked hard, reflected on her writing challenges, and believed that her English writing skills had improved. She admitted that she still struggled with most components of English writing, including spelling, grammar, citing sources, and formatting. However, she enjoyed getting writing assignments because she wanted to continue to learn and improve her skills. She had not used any writing support services the university offered but used Google to help with her paraphrasing while writing. Although she thought her writing skills probably affected her grade when she started her master's program in

the United States, she believed the writing assignments, group work, and corrective feedback she received on her writing had helped her improve. Maya wanted to continue building her confidence and improving her writing and wished she had developed a broader vocabulary before coming to the United States.

Samyuthka

Samyuthka was a 26-year-old woman from India in the second year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Telugu, and she received a doctoral degree in Pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Samyuthka attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing. She never spoke English outside of school, but while in school, she was encouraged to speak only in English and was charged a fine by her teachers whenever she was caught speaking Telugu. However, her mother thought that her English education in primary school was ineffective, so she sent Samyuthka to English classes after school to supplement her education. Samyuthka believed that her primary, secondary, and supplemental education prepared her well for her English and English writing needs in college.

From her secondary education, Samyuthka went directly into pharmacy school. She was not required to take any English or English writing classes in pharmacy school. However, she remembered that her professors regularly deducted points from her assignments if her written exams had grammatical errors. Upon reflection, Samyuthka felt that her professors thought writing was important but did not provide the necessary education to help her improve. When she wrote her research paper in her final years of her doctoral program, her team was told that they should not have any plagiarism in their submission. She and her team learned together the concept and rules of plagiarism and citing references and pooled their money to buy a

plagiarism-checking tool they found online. Samyuthka believed her writing skills developed as a byproduct of the reading, speaking, and listening skills that her professors focused on in college.

When Samyuthka decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education, she was nervous about English writing and speaking. When studying for her English proficiency exam, she focused on writing because she knew there was a minimum score she needed to get accepted into many universities in the United States. She had also been warned by family who had come to the United States before her that writing was necessary. She believed her lack of English writing skills would hurt her exam scores. Because of her focused studying, however, Samyuthka was able to score well on the writing portion. She was somewhat concerned about understanding English accents when she arrived in the United States. However, Samyuthka generally believed that she communicated well after she arrived.

Even after studying for her English proficiency exam, Samyuthka struggled significantly with writing when she first arrived in the United States. She believed that her writing skills had improved after a couple of semesters of courses with writing assignments. However, she knew she had to continue improving to reach proficiency. She attributed her improvement to class writing assignments, feedback on professor mistakes, and learning from others in group work. Her biggest challenges were punctuation and vocabulary. She had a difficult time finding the right words to express herself effectively. Samyuthka used some of the writing support services the university offered and online resources that she found on YouTube. She believed that the improvements she made in her writing helped her with her grades and saved her time with her homework; she just wished she had come to the United States with a high level of English writing proficiency.

Sarah

Sarah was a 32-year-old woman from India who just finished the first year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Urdu, and she received a bachelor's degree in Pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Sarah attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing. However, she felt that the primary focus was always on math and science and less on English. She did not speak English at home and only occasionally spoke English with friends outside of the school or in the community. Sarah believed that her primary and secondary education prepared her well for her English and English writing needs in college.

From her secondary education, Sarah went directly into pharmacy school. Sarah was not required to take any English or English writing classes in pharmacy school. However, she remembered learning about professional English communication skills that she might need in the workplace. In her coursework, the faculty was primarily concerned with evaluating her learning of the content of the classes, and she did not remember them ever grading her or giving her feedback on incorrect grammar or writing inaccuracies. For the rest of her instructors, as long as they could understand her response, her writing skills were not graded. While in college, she attended seminars where she heard about the importance of learning to write well in English. However, her coursework rarely allowed her to develop those skills.

When Sarah considered the United States a destination for her graduate education, she began studying for her English proficiency exam. Initially, she was not concerned about English writing as she had always enjoyed it and never considered it a problem. She took a two-week external training class to prepare for the exam and realized at that point that the writing portion of the exam would be the most challenging for her. When she took practice exams, her writing

score was always the lowest. Sarah focused on her writing while taking her preparatory class and received helpful written feedback from the instructors. They also informed her that the education system and writing style were different in the United States and something she should prepare for. She also got the general impression that writing was important at universities in the United States during her graduate school research activities and discussions with faculty during the application process. Before coming to the United States, Sarah did not do any additional academic preparation, as she believed that the studying she had done for the English proficiency exam should have helped sufficiently. She knew there were support resources for L2 international students at the universities she might attend.

When Sarah started her master's program in the United States, she received significant feedback on her writing, which she appreciated and used to improve her writing skills. Her limited vocabulary was the most challenging part of writing, and she had difficulty expressing her ideas. Sarah used the writing support resources at the university, which also helped her improve her writing. She believed her writing skills affected her grades initially, but the group work, discussion boards, and professor feedback helped her develop vocabulary and develop as a writer. As an L2 international student, Sarah believed it took her longer to complete her writing assignment than many of her peers, and she occasionally felt frustrated by the different education systems. She advocated for L2 international students using writing support services and maintained that practice, and corrective feedback was the most helpful method for improving writing skills.

Uno

Uno was a 25-year-old woman from India in the last year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Telugu, and she received a doctoral degree in Pharmacy from an

English-medium university in India. In the sixth grade, Uno attended a private Catholic English-medium primary school, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing. As a child, she did not speak English at home or with friends outside of school. As Uno got older, she made friends with people who enjoyed English movies, and her father encouraged her to build her vocabulary through word games. She started reading more English novels and watching English television, which helped her develop her English skills. At school, English continued to be a course she was taught, but she learned the foundations of writing, which she enjoyed. Reflecting back, Uno believed that she had all the English and English writing skills she needed for college when she left her primary and secondary education.

From her secondary education, Uno went directly into pharmacy school. Uno was not required to take any English or English writing classes in pharmacy school, as the focus was science. She believed that writing was no longer important, as she and her classmates were asked only to write as much content on a given subject as they could remember, with no comment or critique on how they wrote it. She recalled that many lecturers had poor English skills, which she assumed was why they did not grade their students on their writing. She felt that her English and English writing skills devolved while in college, as many of her professors did not teach them in English, even though it was an English-medium college. Uno's only writing opportunity came when she wrote her research thesis. She found a proficient English professor to give her feedback on her writing and leveraged Grammarly to improve her writing, which was important to her. That was also the first time Uno learned about plagiarism and citing references, for which she was given a website to learn the rules. For the rest of her coursework, the faculty was primarily concerned with her learning the content of the classes, and she can only remember one instructor giving her feedback on incorrect spelling.

Uno had always considered coming to the United States for an education but finally decided at the end of her fifth year of pharmacy school. She did not consider English writing a critical skill when she made that decision. She remembered that as she looked into graduate schools, many had a minimum score for the writing portion of the English proficiency exam, so she gathered that she might be asked to do more writing than usual. However, it did not concern her. Uno acknowledged that her writing score on the English proficiency exam was relatively low and that, despite that, she did not prepare much before coming to the United States for graduate school.

When Uno started her graduate education in the United States, she believed that she managed her English writing well but improved over time. She always spent a lot of time editing and revising her papers and noticed that she needed to spend less time on that activity as the semesters passed. Language use and vocabulary were still a struggle for Uno, as she felt repetitive in her writing. She had not used any of the university's writing support services and had discontinued using Grammarly. She only used the spelling application within her word processing software. Uno did not believe that her writing skills affected her course grades. The group work she was involved in helped her see how others wrote, and she believed that practice and feedback were the best opportunities for her to develop her writing skills.

Vee

Vee was a 27-year-old man from India in the final year of his STEM master's degree program. His first language was Telugu, and he received a doctoral degree in Pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Vee attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, where he studied British English, including all aspects of English writing, by teachers whose native language was not English. Although he was required to speak English at school, he

did not speak English at home, nor did he speak English with friends outside of the classroom or in the community. Vee believed that he learned 100% of the English and English writing he used in college in primary and secondary school, and he had learned it well enough to succeed.

From his secondary education, Vee went directly into pharmacy school. Vee was not required to take any English or English writing classes in pharmacy school. His only writing assignment was a group research thesis they wrote and tried to publish in an international journal. Vee took responsibility for assembling the group members' work. Plagiarism and citing references were significant, but Vee and his teammates needed to learn the rules of source referencing independently. They received feedback on their thesis from their advisor, but it was relatively high level and focused more on content than their writing. For the rest of his coursework, the faculty was primarily concerned with him learning the content of the classes, and he can only remember a few instances when an instructor gave him feedback or took off points for incorrect grammar or writing inaccuracies.

After graduating from college, Vee worked for six months before he decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education. He did not consider English writing a critical skill when he made that decision. He watched several YouTube videos to prepare for his English proficiency exam. When he met the exam requirements to get into graduate school, he assumed that he had the skills he needed to succeed in the United States. He talked to friends who had come to the United States for graduate school who told him that writing was a big part of their education. He did not hear anything from the schools he talked to, nor did he see anything during his graduate school research, so he assumed that writing would be less important in the program he entered.

Although he has had a couple of challenges, Vee thinks he has been successful with his writing since coming to the United States. Plagiarism was his biggest challenge, as he struggled with paraphrasing and synthesizing information from scientific journals. Vee has enjoyed writing. He has not used any writing support services the university offered but used the Grammarly application, which has helped him with his writing. He had been able to follow the professors' writing rubrics, so his writing skills did not affect his course grades, and the group work, writing practice, and corrected feedback had all helped him improve his writing. He thought it was valuable when he had the opportunity to correct drafts of papers and wished he had been more informed about the importance of writing when he started the program.

Vidz

Vidz was a 31-year-old woman from India at the end of the first year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Gujarati, and she received a degree in Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery from an English-medium university in India. Vidz attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing. She moved from a public school to a private Catholic school at an early age and recognized that the education quality was much higher at the private school. Additionally, Vidz was particularly engaged in extracurricular writing activities that she enjoyed. She was required to speak English at school, as the consequence of speaking another language was corporal punishment. However, she did not speak English at home and had only one friend for whom she could practice her English skills outside of the school environment. Reflecting on her primary and secondary education, Vidz believed she was prepared for the English and English writing she needed in college.

From her secondary education, Vidz went directly into medical school. In medical school, she was not required to take any English or English writing classes, and her professors did not focus on English writing skills. They were primarily interested in the students learning the content of the courses, and as long as they could understand her response, her writing skills were not graded. The only writing assignment she was given was her thesis project towards the end of her medical program. However, when she wrote her thesis, she was not provided any education on citing references or plagiarism; the only feedback she received was on the content of her paper. The only other practice Vidz had with writing was when she started writing her application letters for graduate school in the United States and independently sought feedback from individuals she knew had writing skills she could leverage.

When Vidz decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education, she was not concerned with English writing as a critical skill for success. She was much more concerned about her speaking and listening skills. In general terms, she had heard that there was more writing in the United States education system and that students from the United States would be better at it. However, she was not overly concerned, as she had scored relatively high on the writing portion of her English proficiency exam. However, when she arrived, Vidz was very surprised at the writing volume she was assigned in her courses.

When Vidz wrote her first major assignment in her graduate program in the United States, she was marked off a significant number of points for plagiarism, which was a shock to her. She had to take a class to learn source referencing details. After taking that class, she took her feedback on her writing and used it to build on her writing skills. Vidz continued to be challenged with writing concisely but saw continuous improvements over time. The only thing she disliked about writing was the time it takes, but she enjoyed the process and learning from it.

She did not like group work due to the risk of offending her peers with critical feedback, but she appreciated the opportunities to practice and the feedback she got from her professors. Vidz's one wish is that she had learned about plagiarism earlier in her academic career.

Vinni

Vinni was a 24-year-old woman from India in the first year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first language was Telugu, and she received a bachelor's degree in Pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Vinni attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing, but English was not regularly spoken in her school. The teachers would financially penalize English speaking by collecting fines from those students who spoke other languages, but English was still not spoken regularly. Vinni only spoke a few words of English at home and rarely spoke English with friends outside of the school environment. When Vinni left her secondary education school, she believed she had the English and English writing skills needed for college.

From her secondary education, Vinni went directly into pharmacy school. Even though it was an English-medium pharmacy school, some professors taught in English, and others taught in Telugu or Hindi. Vinni was not required to take any English or English writing classes; the only writing assignment she was given was a group thesis project at the end of her degree. At that time, Vinni and her teammates were taught at a high level about plagiarism and referencing sources, but not very much. They had an advisor who reviewed their thesis, but their focus was on the content, and they provided very little feedback on their writing. For the rest of her coursework, the faculty was primarily concerned with grading the content of their responses, with only the occasional professor providing feedback on their writing.

During the final year of her bachelor's degree, Vinni decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education. Although concerned about her English writing skills, she did not prepare academically to come to the United States. Vinni did not recall anyone from any of the graduate programs she looked into talking to her about the importance of English writing skills, and she never saw any mention of it during her research of graduate schools. Vinni practiced independently for her English proficiency exam and scored lowest on the writing portion.

Vinni has been satisfied with her writing skills since starting her master's program. She was still challenged by grammar while writing, and she was working on improving her skills. She found the writing assignments challenging but enjoyable and appreciated the opportunity to learn. She had not used any writing support services the university offered, but the group work she was involved in helped her by allowing her to see how others write. She also valued the written and oral feedback she received from her professors. Vinni did not believe that her writing skills affected her course grades, but she mentioned that it takes her much more time to complete her work than she would like.

Zuri

Zuri was a 24-year-old woman from India finishing the first year of her STEM master's degree program. Her first languages were Telugu and Hindi, and she received a bachelor's degree in pharmacy from an English-medium university in India. Zuri attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, where she studied English, including all aspects of English writing, and was taught by teachers whose first language was not English. They were encouraged to speak English by getting charged a fine every time they spoke a language other than English. Zuri did not speak English at home or with friends outside of school. When she left her

secondary education, Zuri believed that her primary and secondary education had taught he the basics of what she needed in English and English writing for college.

From her secondary education, Zuri went directly into pharmacy school. In pharmacy school, Zuri was not required to take any English or English writing classes, and her only writing assignment was a group thesis in her final year. She and her teammates had a faculty advisor, but the feedback they received focused on the research content and not the writing. That was also the first time Zuri learned about citing references and plagiarism. For the rest of her coursework, the faculty was primarily concerned with her learning the content of the classes. She remembered one professor, however, who was mainly concerned with English writing who provided valuable feedback to Zuri and helped her improve her skills. For the rest of her instructors, as long as her exam responses had the correct content, her writing skills were not graded.

During her final year of pharmacy school, Zuri decided to come to the United States for additional graduate education. She independently studied for her English proficiency exam by watching YouTube videos. She credited passing her exam to studying, as she did not believe she would have passed if she had not studied. She was concerned about her English writing in particular. By studying for the exam, she uncovered writing as one of her most significant challenges. In addition, she had family members tell her about the importance of writing in colleges in the United States. However, when researching graduate programs, Zuri did not see anything about writing skills.

Since starting her graduate program, Zuri had been nervous when completing her writing assignments, but she believed she had met the requirements. Vocabulary and grammar continued to be a struggle for her, but Zuri enjoyed her writing assignments and learning how to communicate professionally in writing. She had not used the university's writing support services

and admitted that her writing skills may have occasionally affected her grades. The group work Zuri was involved in also helped her by allowing her to see how others write, and she felt personally motivated to improve her writing. She believed that the writing assignments and the feedback she was receiving from professors were making her a better writer. However, she acknowledged that L2 international students needed more time to complete writing assignments than students more comfortable with English.

Overall Findings

The overall findings from this research culminated from a synthesis of data dissected and analyzed from an array of data sources. The primary data source was in-depth semi-structured interviews with L2 international graduate student case study participants but also included significant document analysis, website analysis, and interviews with United States college employees who supported prospective, applying, and enrolling international students. Using the logic-model analytic strategy, I generated themes around the actions, influences, and outcomes associated with the early English writing education experiences of a group of L2 international graduate students, their preparation to come to the United States for graduate school, and their experience with English writing once they arrived.

English Writing Education Experiences

The first research question I wanted to explore was how L2 international graduate students' previous English writing education experience helped prepare them for English writing in the United States. The case study participants and the documents I reviewed provided a significant amount of insight and some common themes about the English writing education of these students and how those experiences fed into their English writing skills. I leveraged my logic-model analytic strategy to consider the students' actions, the influences on these students,

and the resulting outcomes. Three main themes surfaced while exploring this question. The first was the limited emphasis on their English education in general during their primary and secondary school years. Second was the low priority on teaching English writing skills. Specifically, a higher priority was put on learning the content of the subjects they were studying than learning or developing their writing skills. In addition, they were given few opportunities to practice their writing, and their education on plagiarism and source-referencing came quite late and was relatively high-level. The final theme that came out of exploring their previous English writing education experiences was the negative impact the experiences had on their writing skills and attitudes and their preparation for future education in the United States.

Limited Emphasis on English Communication

As was the criteria for this study, none of these students spoke English as their first language, but went to English-medium primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions of education. However, across the cases of this study, there was clear alignment that communicating in English was not always made a priority, emphasized, or even encouraged when they were school-aged. From their primary through collegiate education, whether at home, in the community with their friends, or at school, it was not a foregone conclusion that students would end up with highly developed English skills. Most students acknowledged that the English they learned in their home countries was foundational, and just enough to get them through what was needed. Only the students who possessed a significant amount of internal awareness and motivation focused on developing these skills.

Across this multi-case study, the students attended English-medium primary schools, and it was clear that the administrators and teachers of the schools took seriously their responsibility of ensuring that the students spoke English while in school and in their classes. As Uno stated,

“It was a rule that as long as you’re inside school you're supposed to speak English.” Omari commented, “Definitely, they will make us speak English in school.” In fact, several students recalled systems in place that motivated students to speak in English. From a financial perspective, Samyuthka remembered, “If we speak in any other language rather than English, we used to have to pay a fine.” Similarly, Vinni reported, “They used to collect a fine if we don't talk in English.” Vidz, who attended a private primary school, remember a corporal punishment system for not speaking English. When recalling her head mistress, she remembered, “The moment she would hear anyone speaking in Hindi or any other language other than English, she would just beat them. No one no one would dare to speak any other word in any other language, but you have to speak in English.”

However, there was also consistent alignment across the cases that once the students were outside of the classroom, they were not encouraged to practice their English skills. None of the interviewed students spoke English at home. When I asked Bea if she spoke English at home with her family, she replied, “No, no, no, no, no, it's not allowed.” As Elsa explained, “There is no way we would talk in English all day because it's not our native language. We come back to our house, we talk in Telugu, which is our language.” Vinni clarified that it was out of respect for her parents: “Back home, they don't like it if we talk in English. Most of the sentences they may not understand, so that's why I didn’t speak English at home much.” Interestingly, Sarah tied her English-speaking practices at home to her English proficiency: “When we leave school and go in our homes, we don't speak [English]. So, for that reason, I felt very poor at vocabulary.”

In general, the students were not practicing their English skills outside the classroom much at all, because that was not the common language in their communities. Akira made it

clear: “Maybe in classes we would speak in English, but with my friends, I would go back to my mother tongue.” Vee commented, “English is not used in home or public places or outside when you go to places, since our local language is Telugu, or it’s Hindi that’s widely used. You see, I would say, 1% of English when you go out of your school.” Maya remembered the same practice: “In our school, we were taught English, but we were always speaking Nepali, even with my friends.”

Despite the requirements to speak English in class in their English-medium schools, there was a consistent trend across the cases that in their early education, their English education was inconsistent. All of the participants in this study reflected on the variability of the English skills of their primary and secondary school teachers, that English was never their teacher’s primary language, or that their teachers did not always speak English to them in class. Omari made the important point that,

> there are no native English speakers in any school in India. There are two national languages for us, then there will be the third language of English…they don’t know how to speak in English in a professional way, how to communicate with the students in a professional way.

When discussing the English they spoke in their English-medium schools when learning subjects like math and science, there was a consistent alignment that English was not commonly used. Bob commented, “I joined a decent English-medium school for the name, but we didn’t talk English there. It is just a subject of one hour, that’s it.” Vinni had an explanation for it: “So the teachers, they teach in English, but the children, we get it if it is in our own language. So that’s why they used to teach mostly in our language.” Many of the students I interviewed discussed how the schools treated English as more of a subject than as an immersive experience.

Most students had comments similar to Bob. Maya said that learning English was “just a class” and Sarah said it was “just a subject for us.”

This trend did not change when these students went to college. Again, although they all attended English-medium universities, English was not consistently spoken. Most of the students commented how they continued to feel more comfortable speaking in their first language, and the faculty were very inconsistent when teaching courses in English. Bob remembered, “Some teachers would like to teach in English, some teachers would like to teach in our language, like Telugu. It’s not mandatory to teach in English.” Elsa confirmed that “normal communication between a teacher and a student would be Telugu only.” Omari thought it was because “the teachers and the faculty don’t have that much grip on English so they don’t want to speak it.”

Uno had an alternative explanation:

> It also depended on their backgrounds, because some of them had done their college in their own native language, and not at an English-medium school or college. They just took some communication and English classes before they could get a job in another college as an instructor. So such people I could really spot and see they have knowledge, but they don’t know English. So that is why they were struggling to deliver lectures in English. But if it was mother tongue they would do very well. So the minute students started accepting their mother tongue explanations over English explanations, they became comfortable teaching in mother tongue. So that was what would happen.

Document analysis revealed that the faculty at English-medium universities consistently had information in English available on the university websites, both about the faculty and courses. I could not document the authors of the material, however. Regardless of the specific

reason, there was alignment across the cases that English was not consistently spoken in the classrooms, in the halls, and between teachers and students at their English-medium schools.

Before they started sharing their experiences with their English writing education, most of the case study participants reflected generally on their English language education. There was alignment across the cases on the quality or complexity of their English education. Although most students believed that their primary and secondary English education taught them the key fundamentals of English language use, mechanics, and vocabulary, there was a clear theme that they knew that they could have learned more than they did. Samyuthka commented that she was "taught English since childhood, but it was not up to the mark." Maya said, "What I learned in [Nepal] was very primitive. I think it was just meant to be very basic. If they wanted me to speak or read or write something, it was very basic; I cannot say that it was very fluid." Providing a justification, Sarah stated, "We were learning but it was our second language, so it was not that much in depth."

Every student in this multi-case study came from a country that had roots in British colonialism. Many of those students wanted to make the point that they had learned British English, and not American English, and they believed that made a big difference. Vee, from India said, "We used English as a medium for our education in the classroom, for an assignment, or for daily communication in class, but it's not so authentic because we used British English which is standard in India." Bea from Nigeria felt strongly that the difference had caused her problems: "I believe my English level would have been higher; however, the way British and American English goes together is a problem," she said. Finally, Maya from Nepal saw the difference as a source of confusion, claiming, "I realized in our country we were taught in British English. So now here's American English and so there are some things that we're not used to."

Low Priority for Teaching English Writing Skills

In school, from primary through their post-secondary education, there was a clear trend that teaching English writing skills was a lower priority than other academic subjects in general. From early in their education, these students felt that their instructors focused on the sciences or on the content of the subject matter they were teaching. The focus on writing was minimal, with limited grading or feedback on their writing and very little opportunity to practice. Learning the rules of plagiarism and source-referencing did not come to any of them until late in their education, and when it did it was at a very high level.

Content Over Writing. Across the cases, there was overwhelming evidence there was rarely a focus put on English writing by their teachers. First, the clearest theme that came through on this topic was that the curriculum and the instructors were heavily focused on content of the subject matter the students were learning and not on their writing skills. Without exception, their formal English education, writing or otherwise, was completed at some point in high school. From that point on they concentrated on their disciplines. My transcript review of all case participants confirmed that no students took any English, writing, or communication class in college. In addition, their college professors were not concerned about their writing skills. There was a sense that if they had made it to college, then they had learned all the English skills they needed. “What we did was maths, biology, physics, and chemistry,” said Bea. “Because English was already completed before we enrolled to the medical course. There was no reason.” Bob agreed. He thought that his college professors assumed that they knew all the English writing they needed to be successful. Vee confirmed that thought: “Nobody emphasized on English, that you need to follow this sentence structure or follow that writing style. No, it was not emphasized in my high school or in my undergrad. It was all in my intermediate school.”

Most of the case participants painted the clear picture that that their professors were driven to make sure they understood as much content on the subjects as possible, with little care about writing skills. “In my college days, the professors who were grading, they were not focused on grammar or writing skills,” Maya stated. “They would more look after the content. I have to follow the exact process, the formulas, that was the only thing they used to look after.” Bob confirmed that the “focus was on content” and Akira remembered that “they were just looking for the content, not what you’re writing.” Sarah had a similar recollection: “Our exams were just regarding the subject itself. It used to be very much related to the subject. It was never related to how you are framing the sentences or anything like that.” The limited focus on writing carried through to their grades. Consistent across the cases, very few participants remembered their grades being affected by writing skills. A few students mentioned that the only time writing skills became as issue was when the professor could not understand the student’s response. Vee remembered what his instructors thought about writing errors:

> They focused on the content of the subject that you’re learning, and if you don’t write in a proper sentence, they’re not going to cut down your mark. But if they see your sentence and if it was written so incorrectly that you couldn’t understand the sentence, then you might get some points off.

Content was clearly the priority over writing, and this came through in the feedback they received from their instructors as well. A very consistent theme came through from the case participants that the feedback they received on their writing throughout their education experience was minimal at best. No one remembered getting feedback on writing in primary or secondary school and very few received any feedback on their writing until the very end of their university experiences. Elsa was clear that “during undergrad, there wasn’t anything regarding

writing a paper; nobody corrected anything." Sarah agreed. "I did not get any feedback with respect to English," she said.

The reason these students did not get feedback from their instructors could have been due to the relative importance of content over form, or as some of the case participants suggested, it could have been due to the faculty's own writing abilities. As Akira explained it, "Because they are also not that great with their English skills, they were not really interested in judging me on how I [wrote]." Omari had a similar opinion:

> Not many people have that good of an understanding on English, and whether the student is writing the proper English or not. So if the teacher, he himself, or she herself, doesn't know the proper English way of writing, they won't give us advice on the way we write it. They will just grade what we have written if the content is related to the topic or not. They won't concern us with the proper English manner.

Few Opportunities to Write. Outside of writing answers to questions on exams, this group of case participants had a consistently similar experience in their opportunity to practice their English writing. They were not asked to write very often. "Honestly, we did not do much of writing," Sara said. Omari agreed: "I did not get practice writing while I was in pharmacy school." None of them had any significant English writing assignments until the final year of their programs. At that point, most of the students were assigned a research project with an associated thesis. Many of these were group projects, but all of them worked through it with very little writing support. As Bea described, "In my final year I had to do my research and … then I had to write my project. That was the only time that I would say I really had to write on a project, to write concisely with all the information and do it all by myself." The goal, or directive, for most of them was to get it published, so suddenly they were put in situations where

their writing mattered and they generally struggled as they managed through the process. Vee shared a story that was common across the students:

> We have one paper that we published when we did our project, our thesis. We had to write a paper and get it published in an international journal. They told us that you need to publish your paper; get it ready and publish. That's it.

Many students had mentors assigned to them who had English writing skills, but they acted more like editors than mentors. Because they did not have many writing assignments and were not getting feedback on their writing on a regular basis, most students made the changes requested by their mentors without question and without digesting the changes using the opportunity to learn. Sarah described her experience when she wrote her final research paper for her dentistry degree:

> We have a guide, sometimes the head of the department. So initially we write the paper, like one hundred pages, and we divided that one hundred pages into five sections. I would submit my first section to my guide, she would see the concept, she would see my English, she would correct my grammatical mistakes, and ask me to rewrite. Then I would give it to her again, she would correct it and give me it back. Every part of my writing was corrected, even the words were corrected, punctuation, everything. They used to take care of everything.

The case participants who practiced their English writing more and developed the English writing skills beyond what the faculty required were those who were self-motivated to do so and took it upon themselves to find opportunities. For example, when discussing how she developed her writing skills, Uno talked about her extracurricular writing activities: "I was a blog writer for a website, that's where I got to practice, just out of my own love for writing. So that's it, that's it.

That's the only thing that I can think of that helped me." Vidz talked about entering essay writing competitions:

> We had essay writing competitions and paper writing competitions. All those events that added an element of fun to writing. I think with the help of that, I was able to explore more of my writing skills. Whenever I prepared any skit or drama, or when we went out and represented my school or my college in inter-college level competitions, I think that I can count those as an extracurricular activity that added to my writing skills. I thoroughly enjoyed it and it definitely led to some improvements.

Vee was motivated to become a published scientist before his peers, so he independently wrote up some of his research and tried to get it published in a journal:

> I wrote that paper on my own in my third year. I didn't know about styles, I just sent my manuscript as a document. They sent it back to me, saying that the grammar needs to be corrected and the writing has to be in a certain format. Then I went to the internet to learn how to correct my paper, and to learn what is a citation, what they are, and what they do.

That last comment by Vee was another common story across the participant cases. All of these students learned about source-referencing late in their college careers and needed to educate themselves on how to do it.

Limited Plagiarism and Source-Referencing Education. None of the case participants learned about the term "plagiarism" until they were in their final year of college, and several of them never heard that term used by their instructors or mentors. Sarah explained, "Even in my undergrad while I was doing my bachelor's in dental surgery, no one even explained me those words. I don't know what a reference is, or plagiarism." Bob had a similar experience: "I didn't know about plagiarism until I am here [in the United States]. We don't have any plagiarism in

our colleges. We don't have that." When writing their final year theses, they were told about the need to include citations in their papers, but the education on referencing and plagiarism was relatively high-level and focused on the fundamentals of not using someone else's research without giving them credit.

While writing their final research papers, a common theme for these students seemed to be that they knew that they were supposed reference other research in their papers, but the specific on when, how, and why were a little vague. "They taught us a little bit [about plagiarism], but not that much," said Vinni. She shared a story that was similar to other case participants:

> Plagiarism was like using information that already existed, copying and pasting. Not citing our sources shows we are using it again without giving them credit. So this is kind of like the basic information about the plagiarism and citing sources we learned. I got to know much more about how to do it after coming here [to the United States].

Many of these students were made aware of software that could help them with monitoring plagiarism. Samyuthka and her colleagues used software that they purchased on their own: "We used plagiarism tools that we found on Google. We had to pay for it before using, so a couple of groups of students used to gather money to pay for the app to check the plagiarism." Some had resources at their institutions that did the work for them. As Elsa explained,

> Coming to plagiarism, we had a software in our college. I exactly don't remember the name of the software, but that software used to check the plagiarism. We used to complete one section and then send an email with that part to our librarian who would check that part with the software that they have in their system and then send it back to us

with that percentage; how much plagiarism there was, to work on it, reduce it, and send it back.

Negative Impact on Skill Level and Interest in Writing

Through the interviews and particularly the document analysis of these case studies, a consistent theme emerged that by the time these students reached the end of the college programs in their home countries, their English writing skills needed further development. Many of the students were aware of this at the time, and others had negative or ambivalent feelings about writing as a result of their lack of practice and expertise.

Several students in this case study acknowledged that their writing skills got worse during their time in college. “When I came into college for my undergrad as well as my post-graduation, that is where I lost my grip over my English, especially writing,” said Elsa. Uno expressed a similar sentiment:

> I was comparing my own English with the journals I had written in high school and I thought, damn, my English was so good! So, I knew that I was out of touch. If I had put in any effort in my vocabulary and writing in those years in college, I would have been somewhere else.

Others acknowledged that because all of their English writing education happens in primary and secondary school, they probably lost some of their writing skills in college. Some pointed to specific writing challenges such as punctuation, vocabulary, or processing time. Most of them only realized these challenges in retrospect, because writing was not a focus in college and it only became important again when they decided to come to the United States for further graduate education. At that point, even if they were not aware of the writing skill challenges,

they recognized that they had a poor attitude about writing. Some disliked writing, avoided it, had no interest in practicing, or lacked confidence.

Most common was a lack of interest in writing. “We didn’t have the mindset to focus on English writing, because that was not important to us back then,” said Elsa. Omari was aligned with Elsa, and gave some accountability to his mentors: “There is no one to make me understand what is the value of the writing skills, so we are not that much interested in it.” It was as though these students had learned that writing was not the priority. As Vee explains,

> It wasn’t required, and it wasn’t necessary that I was writing well. It was good enough for me to communicate. When I wanted to move to United States, then I had another thought about it. Until then, I didn’t think about it.

There was also a group of students in this study who grew to dislike writing altogether while going through school. Some would only write if they were required. When I asked her about her interest in writing, Akira said, “if given a choice, then no.” Samyuthka and Maya had similar feelings about writing. Samyuthka said that she “disliked writing a lot” and Maya “didn’t enjoy this kind of writing thing”.

Document analysis supported the English writing challenges that many of these students had at the end of the college careers in their home countries. In the writing samples that were submitted as part of these students’ applications to graduate school, which ranged from one to two pages, there were on average five vocabulary errors, nine errors involving mechanics, and ten language use errors. There was clearly some variation, but these results are consistent with the general sentiment of most of the students’ that their writing skills needed further development. The papers that these students wrote in their final years of college, and the first drafts of the paper they wrote in their communications class in the United States supported these

findings as well. While the content of all the written work was understandable and meaningful, English writing language use, vocabulary, and mechanics errors were common. In addition, a large majority (>75%) of their United States communications class papers had plagiarism issues that they needed to address.

Pre-Acculturation Activities

The second research question I wanted to explore was what pre-acculturation activities L2 international graduate students engaged in relative to English writing before coming to the United States. The case study participant interviews, university employee interviews, and some of the documents I reviewed provided interesting data on their preparation and their lack thereof. For this question, the logic-model analytic strategy focused primarily on the actions of these students and the influences on these students by friends, family, and their prospective United States graduate programs and universities. The findings from this analysis resulted in the common themes of a short preparatory lead time, low pre-arrival English writing anxiety, the important role of the English proficiency exam and external guidance from the university and personal sources.

Preparation Lead Time

The first strong theme across the participant cases that came through on this research question was that there was a common characteristic with these students in that most of them made the decision to come the United States for further graduate education in the last year of college at their home institutions. I did not hear a single story of a student who had planned for any length of time to study abroad. So, as these students were going through their secondary and post-secondary educations, there would have been no reason for them to consider the United States education system, how it might be different, or how they should prepare for it. There was

no need to think about how their English, and their English writing skills in particular, had developed and if they needed to concentrate on it more.

For these students, the decision to come the United States was largely pragmatic. As Akira described, “I decided at the end of my fifth year … because I needed a plan of what I want to do after my graduation. I had to decide whether to get a masters or go for a job.” Zuri had a similar story. She decided in July of her final year and almost missed the deadline for the graduate school application. For Uno, she wanted to study abroad, but the United States was not her first choice: “It was end of [my final year]. Until then I didn't know, I was still contemplating countries, and the US was at the bottom of the list, I'm sorry to say, because of the politics.” So for many students, there was not a lot of lead time for pre-acculturation activities.

Prearrival Anxiety

When I talked to these students about their pre-arrival concerns, only a few had any worry about their English writing skills. Most of them, however, had considerable concerns about speaking and understanding others in English. Communicating with their professors and peers was their biggest source of anxiety. They had preconceived notions that people in the United States spoke quickly and with accents that would be difficult to understand. As Vidz described it,

> [Listening] was something that I had to focus more upon because the accent changes, the pronunciation of some words changes. Some people speak very fast. So then I have to be more attentive. When an English speaker or a US speaker is speaking in English, I just have to be attentive and sometimes naturally they pronounce words in such a way that maybe you cannot understand what they're trying to say.

Akira had a similar concern, but about her own English-speaking skills as well. She said, “Like if somebody would talk to me, would they be able to understand my accent? Would I be able to understand them?” Several students shared stories with me about how they increased their intake of English movies and television shows to help them become more familiar with speaking and understanding English.

Concerns about English writing skills were rare. For a majority of students in this multi-case study, it never occurred to them to worry about their writing skills or work on them at all before coming. As Bob put it, “I thought, if I get in, I should be fine.” Elsa had an interesting perspective that was reiterated by others. She explained why writing was not a concern to her relative to the other English language competencies:

> With writing, we can write and go back to the beginning and we can read it and we can correct it, is what I feel. With writing, I didn't think I would face difficulty when I came to the US because I would have more time than when I had to talk to someone.

As a result, very few of the students I interviewed prepared in any way for English writing before coming to the United States. Sarah did not do any additional preparation for writing because she had already “learned all about English writing in school”. Most did not give it much consideration. Similar to Sarah, Vidz remarked, “I relied on what I had learned before.” Because writing samples were part of the graduate school application for these students, I predicted that it might be a source of anxiety or concern for them. In my interview with Libby, an SCSU employee who spoke regularly with prospective graduate students working on their applications, she recalled that their questions on this area were somewhat consistent. “I’ve never received questions about writing quality, or why we want them to submit something,” she explained. “They just want to know what they have to do to make their application complete. So,

I tell them about the acceptable options and usually that is enough information for them." Rhonda, who worked in the graduate studies office shared the same experience: "When they ask us about the requirement, we just kind of give them examples of what they could submit."

There were, however, some students who were concerned about their writing. Zuri knew straight away that English writing was going to be a problem for her. When I asked her to describe what she meant, she said,

> I thought I was pretty bad, and I should work hard at improving. It was a tough time for me, because I know it's the main way you can communicate in your classes. It's kind of like a life skill for me, and after that, I knew I had to do it, and that's it.

Vinni had similar concerns. "It was in my mind from the time I decided to come here," she said,

> because here English is the only thing we can use. The people here in US, they have more knowledge in grammar and like sentence formation, because it's their native language. I didn't have that.

Both Zuri and Vinni took steps to improve their English writing skills before coming to the United States, by way of an English proficiency exam preparation course.

English Proficiency Exam

SCSU required that all of these students take an English proficiency exam and receive a passing score in all four of the English language competencies (speaking, reading, listening, and writing). While there are several options, all the students in this multi-case study took either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. However, the English proficiency exam was much more than a graduate school application requirement for these students. The exam helped them prepare for their education experience in the United States by providing them with an indication of their relative

strengths with the English language. It also gave them insight on what was important to the schools that were asking them to take the exam. A few of the students commented that they believed that the English proficiency exam requirements at a university reflected the importance they put on the English language. As Uno noted, “I knew that when there were minimum scores for each component, the program was going to care about all of my English skills.”

Many of the student case participants indicated the that English proficiency exam helped them prepare for their United States education experience. First, most students prepared for the exam by taking a formal preparatory course or independently finding resources to help them study. These courses gave them the opportunity to improve their English proficiency exam scores (making them more competitive as graduate school candidates) and helped them brush up on their English skills, especially writing. As Elsa clearly stated, “Actually, the English exam that we had to take to come to US, that helped me a lot.” Bob went a step further. “I didn't clearly learn some things in English,” he said. “Before coming to US, I learned more of those things from studying for the IELTS.” All of the students who mentioned preparing for their IELTS stated that they improved their scores because of the preparation.

Sarah intentionally used the English proficiency exam to help with her English language skills, writing in particular, and to learn more about the United States education system. She described her thought process:

> When I thought of studying abroad, when I thought of taking international studies, then at that time I thought, yeah, I need to improve. I'm lagging in writing and I need to improve in that aspect. So I went for the IELTS training course.

Omari also had a plan to use the English proficiency exam preparation course to learn more about the United State education system. He ended up finding out some valuable information about the importance of English writing skills. As he recalls:

> I took an English exam course, IELTS, and I gained some specific insight about how the US education system will be taught English and how we have to communicate with the others. By taking the this IELTS course … I have prepared for that. They will tell us how the English education system will be, and how the professors will be … the main thing they have told to me was that the university gives a lot of importance to the English writing. So I took IELTS coaching, and in that examination, they said writing is the most difficult part.

For most of the students, an added value of taking the English proficiency exam was learning about their English language strengths and development areas. While studying for the exam, there was consider variability in what they focused on. Some studied for the writing component, but others focused reading, speaking or listening. They all had different concerns and channeled their preparation energy in different directions. However, almost all of the students discovered during the process of taking the exam that writing was their most challenging competency. Some of them were surprised, others were not. Sarah said,

> When I took the IELTS, I thought, I can do it, it won't be that difficult for me, but when I was getting the [writing] results, I thought, this is where I need to work on and this is where I need to improve.

Bob thought he had prepared sufficiently. “The other three were higher than writing,” he said.

> I did the writing session well, but I don't know why writing was less than the other three. I wrote writing well. When I was coming out of the IELTS exam, I thought writing will be the highest because I concentrated on writing.

When I spoke to university employees who worked with prospective graduate students, it was interesting to note what seemed to be a disconnect between what they believed about these students and what I had heard from my case study participants relative to the English proficiency exam. Laura, an SCSU employee who worked in the international student services office, had the opinion that the English proficiency exam was not something prospective students were concerned about. She noted, "I think they presume they need fairly decent writing skills coming in. But [relative to the exam] I don't think they're taking additional classes. I don't think they're overly concerned about it." John from the graduate studies office regularly received questions from prospective students asking if they really needed to take the English proficiency exam. He had the impression that they were trying to get out of it.

External Guidance

I suspected that prospective and incoming L2 international graduate students would be more likely to prepare for English writing in their new education program in the United States if they had received overt guidance from someone that they should do so. The overwhelming majority of case participants I interviewed stated that they were never warned or encouraged by anyone to prepare for English writing before coming the United States. In particular, when students were researching universities and talking to potential graduate programs, very few recalled English writing coming up as a topic of interest. Omari seemed to remember quite clearly: "While applying to the university, I didn't notice anything about writing in any emails or any notifications or any webinar. No details or information on the university's webpage or the

application webpage. I didn't notice anything." Elsa had a similar recollection, recalling, "Actually, no one told me the importance of writing; I never knew."

Even though there was very little preparation for English writing from most students, a few of these case participants admitted to receiving some information from outside sources that could have served as guidance. From schools that some students were considering, they received clues about the importance of English writing. As mentioned earlier, the fact that schools had a minimum score requirement on the English writing component of the English proficiency exam was a signal to some students that writing might be important. Other students inferred the importance of writing from conversations they had with university representatives. Akira recalled such a conversation: "They asked me, how confident are you, how interested are you in writing? They did not say it was of much importance, but it was something, a part of discussion." Sarah relays a similar experience: "When I talked to different professors from different universities, I felt how important is the writing. They asked about my research writing in some detail. It made me wonder." Samyuthka remembered seeing a reference to plagiarism on a couple of university websites.

Quite a few students shared information they received from friends and family about writing at American universities. Some were informed that writing was going to be important. Vidz remembered being warned: "Be good at your writing because definitely the professors who will be checking your assignments are proficient speakers and writers. They are at a higher level than we are. So if you're not good at it, develop it." Samyuthka was in contact with members of her family going to school in the United States who "mentioned a lot about writing". They told her that writing was going to be "quite different" than what she was used to. Omari was in contact with friends who he had gone to school with previously who were studying in the United

States. “They told me mainly three things,” he said. “The first thing is about plagiarism, the second is the writing skills, and the third one is the communication skills.”

Warnings about plagiarism were common among the case study participants from friends and family. Maya said, “I think the most I heard about from my friends or anyone was writing; plagiarism is very strict in the US than other countries. So you have to be always careful.” Vee heard a similar warning. His friends, who were six months ahead of him in the United States, told him that their programs had “very much in-depths writing assignments and there was a lot of plagiarism”. They told him he needed to be “very careful”. Vidz’s husband had completed a master’s degree in the United States. She believed that plagiarism and source referencing were the two most important pieces of advice he gave her.

In discussions with SCSU university employees who engaged with prospective international graduate students, they acknowledged that the university asked for writing samples as part of the application process, but the university did not explain why they are asking for those samples or what they were expecting from a writing quality perspective. I confirmed that with a review of the university’s website. Rhonda, an employee from the graduate studies office said, “There’s a section in the application that says ‘required’ and then ‘writing sample’. I don’t think there is any more information than that. Maybe it would be good to add a little explanation.” Libby in one of the graduate programs agreed. “We are really clear on what they need to submit,” she said. “We presume that there are going to know why we are asking for it.” Laura, who engaged with the international student community, said that she assumed that since prospective students saw that we had a minimum score requirement for the writing portion of the English proficiency exam, they understood that their writing skills would be important.

Post-Arrival English Writing Success

The final research question I wanted to explore was how L2 international students' pre-arrival education and pre-acculturation activities influenced their English writing experiences after arriving in the United States for graduate school. The case study participant interviews, SCSU employee interviews, and document analysis provided insightful information on the post-arrival writing success of these students after coming to the United States. For this question, the logic-model analytic strategy focused primarily on the outcomes relative to these students' writing attitudes and abilities. The findings from this analysis resulted in two main themes. The first was on the students' acknowledgement of their initial writing challenges, and the second was the awareness of their ongoing writing challenges.

Initial Writing Challenges

When discussing their initial writing success after coming to the United States, most of the case participants acknowledged that they struggled with their writing when they first arrived, and there were a few different thoughts about the cause and the impact of that struggle. Samyuthka was clear about her initial abilities. "When I was here and newest," she said, "I would say I was three out of ten with my writing." Sarah said she initially "faced a challenge writing" and Maya struggled because in her "first semester [her] writing skills [were] not as good as [they had] to be". Bea thought her writing was "down", and Omari expressed that completing his writing assignments was "difficult".

Some students were overwhelmed with the volume of writing. Vidz reacted to the amount of writing she was asked to do in her first semester:

> I was like, okay, there is too much of writing work. Every two weeks, something or the other we are required to submit. Why are they giving so much of writing work, give me

> some other work that would take less of my time as well... I would say that there are some weeks where it is too much.

Uno also felt stress by the volume of writing: “When we are required to write a paper or even two to three papers for every course, with word limits, that’s pressure.” There was an overwhelming consensus that the first semester or two was challenging.

Many students were quick to point to the English writing education they received in their home countries as the reason for not having more success with writing. Omari claimed, “If they had concentrated on English writing in our school, we would not face the difficulties writing here in the USA.” Samyuthka had a similar sentiment: “If I had learned all the skills, all the required skills back in India, then I think I could see myself at eight or nine to start [out of ten].” Others looked more at the difference in education styles. Sarah said, “If we had the same education system, how they teach in the United States, we wouldn’t feel it so difficult to do things here with respect to English.” Vidz knew that the education system was different in the United States, but when she started in her graduate program, she was not “mentally prepared” for the differences. Akira took a little more accountability. “I don’t want to blame my education on anything,” she said. “I want to take it upon me, but if I had…taken some effort to learn how to do things much better in school…. I would be in a much better stage right now.”

The effects of the students’ writing challenges were variable. Although many students said that their course grades were ultimately not impacted, several students commented that their writing challenges were reflected negatively in how papers were graded or the feedback they received. Omari remembered getting negative marks for not properly using “punctuation, grammatical things, and proper English words”. Zuri also lost points due to vocabulary issues. “When I’m dragging on and not getting to the point,” she said, “and when I’m not able to my

thoughts exactly, that's when I lose marks". Lack of plagiarism and source-referencing knowledge had negative consequences as well. Bob was confused by one of the first writing assignments he got back. "I didn't know if you copy some sentence from the book, you have to put a reference for it or it is plagiarism," he said. Vidz was also surprised by feedback she received from one of her professors. Her understanding of the university plagiarism rules was incomplete, so when she turned in a paper with no in-text citations, she received some negative feedback to which she was not accustomed. "It comes as a shock," she said,

> because you don't like to receive that email from anyone, and when you are not that kind of a person, you don't even intend in your wildest dreams or don't even imagine about it. It actually happened unknowingly. Yeah, it comes as a shock.

I can confirm from the document analysis of these students' first paper written in a communications course that they struggled with their writing and they received critical feedback on their writing skills. While the content of all the written work was solid, errors in English writing language use, vocabulary, and mechanics were common. In addition, a large majority (>75%) of their papers had plagiarism issues that they needed to address, and many of them were significant (e.g., large passages of text cut and pasted from journal articles with no reference).

Ongoing Writing Challenges

Beyond the initial challenges most of these students faced, almost all of the case study participants acknowledged that their English writing challenges were ongoing. While most of them were pleased with the improvements they had made with their English writing skills, they all could identify the areas that still gave them the most trouble. While there was more than one student who admitted struggling with capitalization, language use, formatting, spelling, and

managing word counts, the two most common English writing skills that continue to challenge them were vocabulary choices and plagiarism compliance.

Many of the students were challenged by not having a large enough English vocabulary to express their ideas as they would like to, or to have sufficient variety in their writing. Sarah commented, “I feel like I need to develop with the vocabulary because whenever I was writing, I have the idea in mind, but I cannot express that because I like lack that specific word, how to say that.” Several study participants, including Vidz, Maya, Bea, Akira, and Bob, talked about the need to learn more synonyms to look more polished. Uno summed up their collective concern very well. “I'm more critical of myself when it comes to vocabulary”, she admitted,

> I read my papers and I think I could have used a different or better or richer word. But I end up using the same words all the time. I need to switch things up a little bit in order to not sound so monotonous throughout my paper.

Omari brought up the point that there may be “professional synonyms” for words that they should know when the need to write emails or documents in their work experiences or future employment and he was concerned about learning those.

Maya, Vidz, Bea, Vee, and Zuri all commented that they still struggled with plagiarism, citations, and source-referencing when they wrote papers. Vee had challenges with paraphrasing technical articles and used an online application to check for plagiarism and commented, “When I go online and put my paper into the online check-up, it gives me 60% or 70%, even though if you have written on your own, even if you paraphrase. I have to change words again and again.” Bea’s difficulties were with the mechanics. “What I do have issues with,” she said, “are the citations and then how to actually format the whole thing.”

Another common comment by these case participants was that it takes longer for an L2 international student to write a paper than a peer who is from the United States. Sarah commented that time management had become an issue for her because it took her longer to write her papers than it took her peers. Bea had a similar comment. “When I need to get it done and don’t have extra time, I will get poor marks”, she said, “but when I take my time [my professors] appreciate my writing. Akira said that she did not mind taking the extra time to write her papers or review and revise her work as a student. However, she was concerned that when she got her first job they she would not have that luxury. Vinni summed it up with, “So if writing in English, if we are to use the correct sentence formation, punctuation, it will take time.”

Ongoing English Writing Development

Connected but going beyond the three questions that drove this research project, several themes emerged on how the L2 international students in this holistic multi-case study continued to develop their writing skills and the support that they found most helpful. Output from the logic-model analytic strategy surfaced additional student actions and outcomes that demonstrated their continued desire to develop their writing skills and the positive attitudes that they had. These students had a clear awareness of the activities that were helpful in developing their skills, those which were not, and those they had yet to explore.

Ongoing Improvements in Writing

A very common theme for these study case participants was that their writing skills had improved, they enjoyed writing, they knew they needed to improve even more, and they were motivated to make that happen. Samyuthka, Elsa, Vee, and Bea all commented that they believed they had improved a great deal since starting coursework in the United States. Maya said, “I

think I am much better than before…but I think I still have to work on my writing." Akira's perspective demonstrated a level of confidence:

> I think I'm growing, and I'm improving every day. I can't say that I've done it all, but I'm confident, and I could say that from the [Akira] who just landed here to start her masters and where I am right now, I'm really confident in what I'm doing.

Omari tried to quantify it. "I started at 20%," he said. "Now I can say definitely I have improved my English knowledge…I'm up to like 85% right now." Uno believed that her writing skills, which she thought were always pretty good, were about the same but she was much more efficient with her writing. My document analysis supported this finding. The final draft of student papers in their communications class had many fewer language use, mechanics, and vocabulary errors. These students had also corrected all of their citation and source-referencing issues.

Across all of these cases, writing had become something that they started to enjoy. Some students like Samyuthka, Vee, and Maya, liked it because they knew it was helping them develop their skills. "I'm getting a chance to learn," Maya said, "so yeah, I'm enjoying it." For Elsa and Sarah, they had liked writing as a child, and developed an affinity for it again as they became more comfortable with the expectations in the United States. "The transition was a bit challenging," admitted Sarah, "but now I'm accustomed to it and I enjoy it." For students like Akira and Zuri, writing became enjoyable as their confidence grew. "It's more fun when I'm a little more confident about it," said Zuri. "I love, well, I enjoy writing in English now."

Many of these students acknowledged that they still needed to improve some aspects of their English writing, and they were motivated to do so. Akira, Vidz, Maya, and Samyuthka explicitly talked about the need for continued improvement. "I need to develop," Maya told me.

Samyuthka admitted, “I would say I have to still concentrate on my writing skills in order to improve…and learn more.” Several of these students, including Zuri, Omari, and Akira commented on their growing understanding of the importance of English writing skills which has led to their motivation to improve. For some, there was a professional driver. Samyuthka said it very well: “Writing is the prime way to communicate in the professional world, so I would say I'm much interested in learning more ways of improving my English writing skills. This will definitely help me in getting into my profession.”

Writing Skill Development Support

For all case study participants, there was a significant amount of reflection and awareness around what helped (and did not help) them develop their writing skills. The support pooled into four main categories: feedback, practice, group work, and support services provided by the university.

Feedback. Across a majority of the students, they acknowledged that feedback, both written and oral, was beneficial to developing their writing skills. “What helped me most was the feedback,” said Bea, “because without feedback, there is no way I can forge ahead.” Bob, Elsa, Sarah, Maya, and Omari agreed. Vinni also appreciated understanding what she needed to correct. “I think getting feedback on mistakes helps us to focus more on the parts we to correct,” she said.

The students also had preferences on the type of feedback they received, or at least could discern how the different types of feedback had different benefits. Elsa pointed out the value of written feedback. “Written feedback is better because you can come back and see again if you didn't understand something,” she said. Omari agreed. He said, “I like it if I send a draft document to my instructor, then he sends back with comments like, you should have written this

or you could have used that." Although direct corrective feedback, where the instructor tells the student exactly how to fix their work, is not preferred for everyone. Bea said, "If you spoon feed me all the time, I may not learn. So, I think when you circle the whole thing and tell me to go figure it out, that will help me, that will give me a challenge."

Alternatively, some of the students articulated a strong preference for oral feedback and the benefits of that type of interaction. Vidz commented, "I always find face-to-face interactions or virtual interactions, where I'm able to see the person in front of me, I personally like that better compared to just written feedback…because that person is completely able to convey their meaning properly." Bob agreed: "Walking through the document is different. The understanding for me is different. I think the walk through is the best way." Vinni had a similar comment. She said, "Oral feedback is helpful, because, while talking we are interacting and can explain more things."

Practice. Almost unanimously, the student case study participants agreed that getting more practice with their writing helped them improve their writing skills. Additionally, most of them stated that they wanted to continue with that practice through assignments and other opportunities. When I asked her how I thought she was going to improve her writing skills, Maya said, "I think more writing assignments, because when you are given writing assignments…you are bound to learn, you tend to learn it from your mistakes. So I think that will help me a lot with writing skills." Similarly, Uno was decisive on her opinion on how she was going to improve: "I need to write more. I need to practice."

Several of the students had a unique perspective on the type of practice that would help them the most. Specifically, informal practice that gave them time to see other writing and think

about their own work. Vidz, Maya, and Sarah valued the opportunity to participate in discussion boards. Sarah explained the value:

> Whenever a group discussion on [the online learning platform] was done, I used to read the entries of everyone. I used to read everyone's discussion posts and that helped me a lot. From there, I used to get so many new words, how they're expressing their viewpoints, and how they are putting together which words they are using. So vocabulary we can improve by reading our discussions.

Group Work. As discussed earlier, group writing projects were common for many of these students. In fact, for many of them, it represented the one major writing assignments they had engaged in before coming to the United States. When asked if group writing in the United States, which all had experienced, had been beneficial to them, the response was mixed. Most students thought the group work helped them, and the benefits came in a couple of different areas. First, it had been helpful for many students like Bob, Maya, Sarah, Zuri, Vinni, and Vee, because they could see how other students, especially American students, wrote. As Vee explains,

> We had local speakers also and we had a chance to learn from their perspective and see how their knowledge was about their writing and how they put their words out. So it was helpful a lot rather than just sticking to my own perspective… I had a chance to learn from others.

For others, the benefit came from the sense of responsibility they felt when others' grades were relying on the quality of their writing. It was a motivating factor for them. Omari expressed his feelings this way:

> Because of my English language skills, the whole group work should not be affected or degraded. Points should not be deducted based upon my work…We are in the US for doing a master's at a top-notch university. The English should be at a top-notch level, so I took that as a challenge.

For Akira and Uno, working with English they saw as more developed than them was inspirational. Uno said,

> When I dealt with [specific peers] in my group projects, I would look at their content, and I felt they managed to express so much in such less amount of words and that is what I always wanted to achieve. So I think that kind of writing is what I always looked up to.

Akira agreed: "So when I see others, I get inspired and also I understand their thinking process. So I try to understand from their perspective and learn from them."

University Support Services. Relative to formal external support for developing their writing skills, the case study participants primarily relied on two main sources, their coursework instructors and themselves. As mentioned earlier, most of the students described how practice and oral and written feedback in their courses helped them develop their writing skills. These students specifically pointed to their coursework and the activities and assignments the professors gave them as beneficial to their development. Sarah provided a representative comment: "I have taken communication class that helped me a lot. I can say I have become confident enough to write and understand what is being asked of me…very helpful for me with respect to English writing…for every class."

Approximately half of the students referenced using their own initiative and online resources to help develop their writing skills. Maya used Google for paraphrasing and Akira used Google for finding synonyms. Elsa, Vee, Uno, and Akira used the Grammarly application to help

correct their writing. However, many of these students also admitted that these resources were of limited benefit, as they struggled with understanding the corrections the application suggested. Uno commented, “I didn't feel like it corrected much. It didn't do anything except remove a comma, or remove or add a full stop between two sentences. So eventually I just stopped using it, and I would just use spell check.” Comparing their comments to my document analysis, however, supported the finding that using Grammarly was not very effective in assisting them with their writing assignments.

Almost every student knew about the formal writing support services their university in the United States had available, such as the student writing center and the online learning platform writing tutor service. However, only a couple of students said that they used them, despite the fact that they were virtual. For those students who used those services, none of them used it for class assignments. For example, Bea used it when she decided to she wanted to apply to a doctoral program and had to write a letter of interest, and Sarah used it during spring break to try to brush up on her writing skills. During my interviews with SCSU employees who engaged with graduate and international students, they all referenced our writing support services as our solution for helping our L2 international students with their writing. Garren, who worked with the international student community, thought that they regularly told students about the services and that students used them. However, he followed that by saying, “I feel like we may not be intentional with it. We've been very generalized with it. We have it, we tell them about it, but we don’t emphasize that this [something] to do to be successful.”

Synthesis

The findings from this study are the results of my in-depth review and analysis of 13 L2 international student case study participant interviews, five SCSU employee interviews, and

hundreds of pages of document analysis. These data captured the actions, influences, and outcomes of these L2 international students relative to their English writing experiences, their preparation to come to the United States for graduate education, and their writing success once they arrived.

From an early English education perspective, the common experience of these students was that they went to English-medium schools where speaking English was required, but that requirement was variably enforced. The faculty did not always use English, and English was rarely used by the students outside of the classroom. Their general perspective was that their English education was relatively basic and often not the highest quality. The fact that all of these students were educated in historically British-colonized countries was another confounding factor in their English language education.

The data showed that teaching English writing skills was not a priority throughout their education. Their curriculum focused on content over their writing skills. English education stopped at or before the end of high school. The faculty grading their work, who often had developing English skills themselves, primarily gave marks on content rather than writing and rarely provided feedback on the students writing. The students had few opportunities to practice and develop their writing skills through school. For almost all case participants, their one opportunity to write was in their last year of college, where many wrote up a research project in a small group. Even for that writing project, many of their mentors would correct their writing for them rather than providing them with a learning opportunity. They learned plagiarism and source-referencing rules late in college, and several had to supplement their training and support on this topic independently. Some students, particularly drawn to writing, found their opportunities to write with extracurricular activities. In college, the students felt like their writing

skills stagnated or devolved because of this shift in focus away from writing, and their writing samples confirmed excellent subject matter content but significant language use, mechanics, and vocabulary issues.

From a preparation standpoint, these student case participants decided to come to the United States for graduate school very late in their post-secondary school tenure. They seemed to have made the decision quickly for career opportunities. Prior to coming to the United States, few students were worried about their English writing. They were more concerned with their speaking and listening skills, which were more important for communication. With a few exceptions, they did not worry about or prepare for writing. Their English proficiency exam, however, played a significant role in their move to the United States. Many prepared for the test, formally and informally, to help prepare for their education in the United States and to help with their writing and other English skills. They also learned about their strengths and weaknesses by taking that exam. The SCSU employees had an interesting perspective on the English proficiency exam, assuming that L2 international students thought it unimportant and tried to avoid taking it.

Before coming to the United States, these L2 international students said they did not get any guidance from friends, family, or university contacts that they should prepare for English writing. However, they did admit that they received clues that writing would be important once they arrived. Some conversations and information on university websites suggested that writing would be a component of their future education. Friends and family with experience in the United States told them about the emphasis on writing and plagiarism. However, SCSU employees acknowledged that they did not tell students about the importance of writing or why they asked for writing samples as part of the graduate school applications.

After these students arrived in the United States, their experiences with their English writing assignments were challenging. They struggled with their writing skills and the writing volume they were asked to complete. Many of them pointed to the English writing education they had received in their home countries as the reason for these struggles, and for some, there was a negative impact on their grades. The most significant issues these students struggled with on an ongoing basis were having a large enough vocabulary to express their ideas effectively, mastering the expectations around source-referencing and citations, and the length of time it took them to complete their English writing projects.

This group of L2 international student case study participants believed that they had improved their writing skills since coming to the United States; document analysis supported that. They had also collectively developed to a place where they enjoyed writing and looked forward to improving more. They had clear ideas for what types of support best helped them develop their writing skills. For most, oral or written feedback was hugely beneficial. Most students also agreed that practice, in the form of writing assignments or participation in discussion boards, helped them. Finally, group writing projects were a popular support option for various reasons, including providing examples to learn from, motivation to write well for team success, and looking to other writings for inspiration. SCSU regularly shared the formal writing support options (e.g., writing center, online writing tutors) with L2 international students and assumed those services would be a source of writing support for them. For these students, although they were aware of these formal services, almost none of them used them for their writing assignments. From their perspective, the practice, guidance, and feedback they received from their coursework professors were the most utilized support opportunities.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a holistic summary of each student case participant, briefly describing their primary, secondary, and post-secondary school experiences relative to English writing in their home countries. I also included each participant's perspective on how they prepared for coming to the United States and their thoughts on their English writing success since arriving. Next, using a logic-model analytic strategy, I described how the data from my student case participant interviews, SCSU employee interviews, webpage, and document analysis generated findings to explore my three main research questions. I provided several common themes on L2 international students' early English writing education experiences, how they prepared for coming to the United States, and their English writing experience when they first arrived in the United States for their continued education. I also went beyond that to describe these students' ongoing writing development and the support they need for that development.

In chapter five, I will discuss these findings further and put them into context with the existing literature on L2 English language learners and L2 international students. I will also describe the limitations of this study. Finally, I will describe how my findings have implications for theory, research, and practice, particularly for universities in the United States trying to support L2 international students in their English writing success.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative holistic multiple-case study was to examine how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. I embedded this project into the existing research on the writing challenges of L2 English language learners and L2 international students. I took a holistic view of individual students' lifetime of English writing education and experiences and examined how those students are prepared for English writing in the United States. The following research questions guided my research:

- How did L2 international graduate students' previous English writing education experience help prepare them for English writing in the United States?
- What pre-acculturation activities did L2 international graduate students engage in relative to English writing before coming to the United States?
- How did the L2 international students' pre-arrival education and pre-acculturation activities influence their English writing experiences after arriving in the United States for graduate school?

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature supporting this research. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and Berry's Acculturation Model (2005) formed the basis of my theoretical framework, which I described. From there, I reviewed the literature on the academic and cultural challenges that L2 English language learners and L2 international students experience when developing their English writing skills. Then, within Bandura's Social Learning Theory framework, I reviewed the literature on how L2 English language students learned and reinforced their English writing skills. Specifically, I summarized the key points on L2 English

language learners' primary and secondary English writing education, the roles of practice, coaching, and motivation in English writing skill development. Finally, I reviewed the literature on international students' academic and social pre-acculturation. I ended Chapter 2 by situating my research project in the literature.

In Chapter 3, I provided a detailed description of how I conducted this study. I reviewed my positionality, potential biases, and philosophical approach to this research with a pragmatic worldview. I then described the research design and methods of this holistic multi-case study. I included details on how I recruited the 13 L2 international student case participants from whom I collected my primary dataset via in-depth semi-structured interviews. I also included details on the corroborating data I collected through SCSU employee interviews and multiple documents from the student case participants and webpage research. I explained how I analyzed data using a logic-model analytic strategy and how I ensured data trustworthiness, authenticity, and human subject protection in the research.

In Chapter 4, I described how the data from my student case participant interviews, SCSU employee interviews, webpage, and document analysis generated findings surrounding my three main research questions. In this chapter, I move those findings forward with a more detailed description of how my findings integrate into the existing literature and specifically answer my research questions. The discussion will lead into how my findings inform opportunities and implications for theory, future research, and higher education practices, particularly for universities in the United States supporting L2 international students.

Summary of Findings

The data from this research study provided sufficient evidence to generate interesting and meaningful answers to my three primary research questions. The holistic multi-case design and

logic-model analytic strategy resulted in common themes and cross-case conclusions from interview and document analysis data that supported the findings.

Research Question #1

My first research question was, ‘How did L2 international graduate students’ previous English writing education experience help prepare them for English writing in the United States?’ This study's findings suggest that the L2 international student case study participants' primary, secondary, and post-secondary education did not prepare them well for their English writing graduate school experiences. There were a couple of reasons for this conclusion.

First, even though these students attended English-medium schools where speaking English was required, that requirement was variably enforced. The faculty did not always use English, and English was rarely used by the students outside of the classroom. The student’s general perspective was that their English education was relatively basic and not as advanced as it could have been. Many also believed that because they were educated in historically British-colonized countries, their English language education did not set them up for success in the United States.

Second, teaching English writing skills was not a priority throughout their education. Their curriculum focused on content over writing skills, and their English education stopped at or before the end of high school. The faculty grading their work, who were often more comfortable with their first language than they were with English, primarily evaluated students on content rather than writing and rarely provided feedback on their writing. These students had few opportunities to practice and develop their writing skills until their last year of college. For these research projects, many of them wrote up their research in small groups, and they received little feedback or guidance on their writing. They were held accountable for plagiarism and

source-referencing rules for these projects, but their education on these topics was high-level. In fact, in college, some students felt like their writing skills stagnated or devolved because of this shift in focus away from writing.

Research Question #2

My second research question was, 'What pre-acculturation activities did L2 international graduate students engage in relative to English writing before coming to the United States?' The findings from this study indicated that most of these students did not prepared specifically for English writing before coming to the United States. All the student case participants made the decision to come to the United States for graduate school very late in their post-secondary school tenure. Few students were worried about or prepared for their English writing. They were more concerned with their speaking and listening skills, which they thought was more important for communication.

However, these students took their English proficiency exam very seriously, and it played a big role as they prepared to move to the United States. Many prepared for the test not only to ensure that they received a high enough score to get into the university of their choice, but to help prepare for their education in the United State and to help with their writing and other English skills. They also learned about their strengths and weaknesses of the English language by taking that exam.

These students did not take steps to prepare more for English writing because they claimed that they did not get any guidance from friends, family, or university contacts that they preparing was necessary. However, they did admit that they received clues about the emphasis on writing and plagiarism in the United States education system from university websites and advice from friends and family with experience with higher education in the United States.

SCSU employees, however, acknowledged that it was not common practice to tell students about the importance of writing or explain why writing samples are part of the graduate school application.

Research Question #3

My third research question was, 'How did the L2 international students' pre-arrival education and pre-acculturation activities influence their English writing experiences after arriving in the United States for graduate school?' The data from this research showed that after these students arrived in the United States, their experiences with their English writing assignments were challenging. They struggled with their writing skills and the volume of writing they were asked to complete. The biggest issues these students struggled with on an ongoing basis were having a large enough vocabulary to express their ideas effectively, mastering the expectations around source-referencing and citations, and the length of time it took them to complete their English writing projects.

However, this group of L2 international student case study participants improved in their writing skills after arriving in the United States. They grew to enjoy writing and looked forward to improving more. They had clear ideas for what types of support best helped them build on the writing skills once they arrived in the United States. Oral or written feedback, practicing with writing assignments or discussion boards, and engagement with group writing projects were all viewed as promising English writing development opportunities. Surprisingly, formal English writing support such as writing centers and online tutoring was underutilized.

The results of this study were closely aligned with the previously literature on L2 English language learners, pointed to some useful areas for future research, and provided support for

some helpful pragmatic ideas to better support L2 international students with their English writing challenges.

Discussion

The findings from this study are the results of my in-depth review and analysis of 13 L2 international student case study participant interviews, five SCSU employee interviews, and hundreds of pages of document analysis. These data captured the actions, influences, and outcomes of these L2 international students relative to their English writing experiences, their preparation to come to the United States for graduate education, and their writing success once they arrived.

Early Education Experiences

From an early English education perspective, the common experience of these students was that they went to English-medium schools. However, English was rarely spoken by the students at home or in the community. Given that 11 out of the 13 case participants were from India, reflecting on the reality of that linguistic environment is valuable. People in India speak thousands of languages, and 122 languages have over 10,000 native speakers (Azam et al., 2013). Only 4% of Indians reported the ability to speak English fluently, 11% reported it as a second or third language, and 0.2% reported it as a native language (Azam et al., 2013). It should be unsurprising that the English these students learned in schools was not spoken regularly at home or in the community. The impact of this was described over 50 years ago by Gardner (1968), who concluded that L2 language acquisition was highly dependent on parental encouragement.

The case participants from India also stated that while speaking English was supposedly required at school, that rule was variably enforced. In addition, the faculty did not always use

English with the students. Ramanathan (2016) reported that this was a common occurrence in India. Because of the rapid expansion of English-medium schools in India, it was difficult for the schools to find teachers with highly proficient English skills, and the teachers' beliefs and practices around what it meant to teach their students functional English varied significantly (Ramanathan, 2016). In addition, there seemed to be no movement toward establishing a standard or consistent teaching standard (Ramanathan, 2016).

Similarly, the students also had the general perspective that their English education, including their writing instruction, was relatively basic and often not of the highest quality. This is consistent with the literature reporting that the challenges faced by L2 English language and L2 international students relative to their writing skills stemmed from a poor academic foundation (Al Murshidi, 2014; Altinmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017; Toba et al., 2019). It is also aligned with the data from other studies that indicated students believed they were not taught the basic English writing skills necessary to succeed in the United States (Al Murshidi, 2014; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017; Toba et al., 2019). In a survey of almost 2,000 Nigerian ESL post-secondary learners, the students indicated they were not taught enough basic writing skills (Okpe & Onjewu, 2017).

Specific to India, Jayadeva (2019) reviewed English-medium schools. He reported that an increasing number of primary and secondary schools in India became designated as English-medium and included English in the curriculum because families regarded English fluency as critical for their children's future success. However, the English fluency that resulted from attending these schools was highly variable. The researcher warned that parents should make decisions on the English-medium school to which they send their children based on the level of

English language competency they think they will need in the future (e.g., a future career working at a global call center vs. working at a shop that serves English-speaking tourists; Jayadeva, 2019). It is possible, if not likely, that the students in this case study, are basing their evaluation of their English education in comparison to that of an American's level of English competency. The comparison may be accurate, but given that most of these students decided within a year of arriving that they would study in the United States, it is unlikely that their family had been preparing them for that future need.

The data from this research showed that teaching English writing skills was not a priority throughout their education. Their curriculum focused on content over their writing skills, primarily math and science content. The students perceived that their grades were based only on the content, and the instructor would only scrutinize their writing if they could not understand their answers. This practice is similar to reports from other researchers who published that in classwork in Indonesia and Turkey with English writing assignments, faculty provided feedback on the writing content but not on the mechanical errors of the students' writing (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019). Similarly, in some countries, faculty emphasized rote memorization rather than writing and critical thinking in the curriculum, so developing those skills was not a priority (Ravichandran et al., 2017; Singh, 2019). As Dörnyei (2003) reported, teachers play an important role in educating students on the importance of English writing skills.

With L2 English language learners, it has been reported that demonstrating an effective transfer and acquisition of knowledge is the primary goal (Altinmakas & Bayyurt, 2019). The research papers I read from these students in my healthcare-related communications class made this apparent. The content and ideas they wanted to convey in their work were always well-developed and interesting. These were doctors, dentists, and pharmacists with varied interests in

medical therapies. They needed to develop further their understanding of English writing vocabulary, language use, mechanics, and source-referencing.

The students also noted that the faculty giving their lectures and grading their work at their post-secondary institutions had variable English language abilities. There were numerous stories of faculty teaching the textbook material in English but switching back to a local language to answer questions or converse with the students. This has been documented in India previously. Clement and Murugavel (2015) reported that engineering professors in India effectively taught their students the subject matter from the textbooks. However, they were ineffective and needed additional education and training in conversational and formal English.

The students had few opportunities to practice and develop their writing skills through school. For almost all case participants, their one opportunity to write was in their last year of college, where many wrote up a research project in a small group. This is one of the biggest reasons these L2 international students unanimously struggled with writing when they arrived in the United States. The practice has improved L2 English language learners' writing abilities (Akhtar et al., 2019; Haider, 2012) and attitudes toward writing (Abas & Aziz, 2016; Faraj, 2015; Nasser, 2019). Similarly, a lack of practice has resulted in poorer attitudes about writing (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Sun & Wang, 2013) and increased difficulty with English language use, mechanics, and vocabulary (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ceylan, 2019; Irzawati et al., 2021; Toba et al., 2019). Those case study participants who found extracurricular opportunities to write, Vee and Uno, clearly demonstrated a more confident attitude about writing.

Most of the case study participants did not learn formally about plagiarism, citations, and source-referencing until late in college, and some did not learn about it until they reached the

United States. They seemed to have been taught not to copy the work of others and that a research paper should have a reference section but not much more than that. There was much independent learning on this topic when they wrote their research papers in their home country universities. This is also the area of writing that gave many the largest source of angst, mainly because it was a question of ethics. Challenges in understanding plagiarism norms in the United States are well-documented (Al Badi, 2015; Jiang & Chen, 2019; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Riazantseva, 2012; Singh, 2019). This research supports those previous findings and underscores the ongoing need to give L2 international students the appropriate knowledge and tools early to avoid uncomfortable situations.

Pre-Acculturation Activities

From a preparation standpoint, all of these student case participants made the decision to come to the United States for graduate school very late in their post-secondary school tenure. They seemed to have made the decision quickly for career opportunities. This scenario set the stage for less preparation, for no reason other than a lack of time.

Prior to coming to the United States, few students were worried about their English writing. They were more concerned with their speaking and listening skills, which were more important for communication. Abrar et al. (2023) reported that effective communication with their advisors was one of the primary challenges for L2 international students writing their dissertations, supporting that proficient speaking skills is related to English writing success. With a few exceptions, they did not worry or prepare for writing. When questioned, it appeared that it never occurred to them that they should take steps to prepare, even with contextual clues at play. This could be aligned with the body of research that indicates L2 English language learners do not understand the importance of learning English writing skills or are explicitly not motivated to

do so (Akhtar et al., 2019; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). This points to the need to inform potential graduates of the importance of English writing skills.

However, the preparation these L2 international students invested in was their English proficiency exam. Many prepared for the course; some by taking formal courses and some by self-studying with YouTube videos and online assistance. The importance these students put on this exam seemed to come from the fact that most academic higher education programs in the United States require some form of English proficiency exam for L2 international students from countries where English is not one of the national languages (Wood, 2022). SCSU has a minimum score requirement for the overall English proficiency test and each subcomponent (SCSU, n.d.-d). So, both universities and students put a significant amount of value on these proficiency exams. However, the research should make everyone temper their expectations, at least to the predictive nature of the English proficiency exams. For every study supporting that English proficiency exam scores predict academic success (Rose et al., 2020; Xie & Curle, 2022), one can find another study indicating the two are not related (Curle et al., 2020; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015).

One of the most interesting findings from this study was that many of these L2 international students used the English proficiency test not only to get accepted into a graduate program in the United States but also as a tool for preparing to study in the United States. They saw the exam as a preview of what level of English competency might be expected of them when they arrived. They also saw the process of preparing for and taking the test as their way of brushing up their English language skills. While there certainly was some benefit to any activity that involved reviewing their English language skills, relying on the English proficiency exam as

a preparation tool may have limited value. Bai and Wang (2020) indicated that Chinese international students who took a preparation course for the IELTS were frustrated at the limited academic writing the exam (and, therefore, the IELTS preparation course) covered. I did not find much data on students leveraging English proficiency exams as a source of academic preparation, which could be an interesting research area.

The reasons for not preparing for the English writing that might be expected of them when they arrive in the United were vague. Many of these L2 international students told me they did not get guidance from friends, family, or university contacts to actively prepare for English writing. However, they admitted to receiving clues that writing would be necessary once they arrived. A few students talked about conversations with university employees who brought up the topic of writing. A couple of other students mentioned seeing emails or items on web pages about writing support or plagiarism that made them think that writing might be the focus at some point in the future. Still, others acknowledged that they had friends and family with education experience in the United States who told them about the emphasis on writing and the increased emphasis on plagiarism.

However, these students were still more concerned about how well they would communicate with others when they reached the United States. Case participant Akira brought up the insightful comment that with writing, there is time for her to go back and review her work, but with speaking and listening, success or failure is immediate. Nation and Macalister (2021) describe that teaching L2 learners about writing involves the ongoing review and revision process. This could lead to students deprioritizing writing preparation and assuming that they will be successful with the foundational knowledge they possess, expecting they will have time to review and revise their writing when they arrive.

Another notable point was the unexplained writing-related requirements in the graduate school application. At SCSU, there was a minimum score for the writing component of the English proficiency exam, and a writing sample was required for some graduate programs. Researchers have reported that English proficiency exam scores do not always predict academic success (Curle et al., 2020; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015). Regardless, this study revealed that students did not ask why there were writing-related requirements, and university websites and employees working with prospective L2 international students did not explain why they were required either. There appeared to be conversations around what the writing sample needed to include, but not its purpose. If the purpose of the writing sample and the writing proficiency score was because the program knew that writing was an important academic characteristic for a student to possess, perhaps it would be beneficial for that to have been overtly shared with them.

Post-Arrival English Writing Success

After these students arrived in the United States, their experiences with their English writing assignments were challenging. They acknowledged their challenges; on average, their initial writing assignments showed large numbers of errors with language use, mechanics, and vocabulary choice. Many of them also had various forms of plagiarism problems. These challenges are consistent with the literature on L2 English language writing problems. English language use (e.g., verb tense, articles, prepositions, pronouns; Jacobs et al., 1981) is the most common challenge with these students (Ahmed & Alamin, 2012; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015; Riazantseva, 2012). Mechanics, including misused punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (Hasan & Marzuki, 2017; Nasser, 2019; Rahmat et al., 2022; Zhan, 2015) and vocabulary are also commonly reported challenges for L2 English language writing students (Ahmed & Alamin, 2012; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Lee & Tajino, 2008; Melissourgou &

Frantzi, 2015). In addition, plagiarism violations are not uncommon (Al Badi, 2015; Jiang & Chen, 2019; Singh, 2019). Faculty of L2 international students should be prepared for these types of writing challenges.

Ongoing English Writing Development

One extremely positive finding in this study was the improvement this group of L2 international students experienced with English writing and their motivation to continue developing as writers. The document analysis I performed and my insight confirmed both of these things. Adding to their increased enjoyment of writing, there is a good chance of their continued success with writing. Researchers have reported that a strong motivation to learn and improve English writing skills was positively correlated with improved English writing proficiency and writing performance (Limeranto & Mbato, 2022; Sun & Wang, 2020). This leads to the best ways these students feel they could receive help with their writing. Understanding their perspective is important for providing the right kind of collaborative support during their coursework.

For most, oral or written feedback was hugely beneficial. They liked knowing where they were making mistakes and ensuring they understood the feedback correctly. These findings are consistent with other research on feedback preferences with L2 English language writing students. Students have acknowledged that they want more feedback on their writing (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019), and they wanted their instructors to indicate where their mistakes were and how to fix them (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; McMartin-Miller). In addition, the verbal one-on-one component that the students from this study found valuable is aligned with the students studied by McMartin-Miller (2014) and Okpe and Onjwu (2017), who discovered they were confused by the written feedback and were not sure how to proceed with it. Active

feedback is also supported by those guiding instructors of L2 English writing learners (Forbes, 2021; Nation & Macalister, 2021).

Most of the students from this study also agreed that practice in writing assignments or participation in discussion boards helped them improve their skills. This was similar to the L2 international students in the United States studied by Ravichandran et al. (2017), who acknowledged that practice improved their writing and other groups of L2 English language writing students who asked for more opportunities to practice (Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015; Rahmat et al., 2022). In addition, Naghdipour (2022) reported that students increasingly use asynchronous discussion boards to help resolve formal writing problems. This supports other research showing that practice is the primary method for improving writing skills in L2 English learners (Akhtar et al., 2019; Haider, 2012) and that practicing writing improved both writing skills and positive feelings towards writing (Abas & Aziz, 2016; Faraj, 2015; Nasser, 2019). Practice with writing was also a component of recommended teaching strategies for L2 English learners by experts in the field (Cook, 2016; Forbes, 2021; Nation & Macalister, 2021).

Finally, group writing projects were a popular support option for various reasons, including providing examples to learn from, motivation to write well for team success, and looking to other writings for inspiration. This aligned with the results from several studies that demonstrated that putting L2 English language learners into peer groups for feedback contributed to improved writing abilities in an environment that students enjoy more than other forms of feedback (Ho et al., 2020; Hoomanfard, 2017; Kitjaroonchai, 2022; Kuyyogsuy, 2019). Group work also taught students to become better learners (Son, 2022). In addition to greater writing capabilities, this strategy reduced anxiety and improved attitudes about writing (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021; Farrah, 2012; Kurt & Atay, 2007). A caveat based on personal insight and

comments from a couple of case participants is that attention should be paid to the construction of the teams when including L2 English language learners. The motivation to not disappoint team members could create a negative atmosphere if the disappointment is felt and expressed by someone other than the L2 learner. This aligns with the caution expressed by Mazanderani et al. (2022), who warned that L2 international students could feel marginalized if peer group activities were not set up with the right expectations, including the opportunity for a globalized context of the subject matter.

It was clear from this study that the formal writing support options (e.g., writing center, online writing tutors) were underutilized by these L2 international students. It was also clear that it was not because they did not know they were available. The students acknowledged their awareness of these opportunities, but very few used them. The SCSU employees who engage with graduate and international students believed they advertised these services early and often, and it also appeared that they believed that L2 international students were using them more than they did. These services are another option for students to receive many of the writing support options they desire that were mentioned earlier. Other researchers have reported that seeking out formal writing help is a successful strategy for L2 international students (Abar et al., 2023), and writing centers are often used by L2 international students to help with language use challenges (Eckstein, 2018), finding strategies to increase the utilization of these services would be a winning strategy.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. One limitation is the power relationship between the researcher and the case study participants. Although I was not their professor during the interview and knew there was little chance that I would be their instructor in the future, there was

still a potential power imbalance at play. They may still have perceived that I had some academic control or power over them. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) discuss respecting this imbalance between the research and the participants. They warn the interviewer to consider the "consequences of the interview for the interview and to the groups to which they belong" (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 94).

There are a couple of points worth noting on this limitation. First, during my interview introduction, I spent much time on the purpose of my research. I wanted to clarify that my goal was to better support L2 international students with their English writing in the future. At that time, I received what I perceived as genuine positive feedback from my participants on the study's intent. Second, these study participants were my students in my communications class, and I spent significant one-on-one time with them discussing their writing errors, successes, and ongoing challenges. With that historical relationship, I believe that mitigated the vulnerability another participant might have felt if I had asked them about their English writing challenges. At some level, these participants realized I already knew some of their past challenges with writing. Finally, in my data analysis, I redacted any transcription content that referred to my competency as a professor or English writing mentor. As much as I would like to believe that I played a role in their English writing development, I could not trust that the comments were not inadvertently or intentionally superfluously complimentary.

Another limitation of this study is that all case study participants were from one college at a single university in the Midwestern United States. In addition, 11 of the 13 case study participants were from India. In the natural sciences, a critic might claim a case of 'pseudoreplication' (Heffner et al., 1996), where the samples the researcher evaluated are not genuinely independent. In case study research, this is both a limitation and a strength. Yin (2014)

proposes that for multiple-case study designs, the researcher can choose strategically to find cases similar to one another to strengthen the generalizability of the results. This is particularly true in holistic multi-case studies where the characteristics of the cases are similar, but the contexts are unique (Yin, 2014).

In this research, the fact that all participants attended the same university in the United allowed for specific data that would have otherwise been unavailable. The interview data with the SCSU employees was relevant only to the university the case participant attended. I, the researcher, had access to comparable writing samples that would otherwise have been unavailable to me. In addition, the implications of this research can be applied much more directly to this particular university while still being relevant to other universities with similar student populations. Remember, the convergence in university attendance only happened after the case participants had completed their first college degrees. Finally, although the vast majority of case participants were from India, the two case participants from other countries (Bea and Maya) had data that aligned tightly with the data from the other participants.

The final limitation of this study is that all of the case participants were studying in STEM fields at the time of their interviews and had come from STEM academic programs in their home countries. The current and historical writing challenges could depend on the fact that they were focused on math and science, where writing may not have been as critical. Morton et al. (2015) reported that science-focused students in Australia had poorer perceptions of writing than other students. It is possible that a group of L2 international journalism or business graduate students may have different English writing experiences and attitudes. That would be an interesting holistic multi-case study follow-up to this research.

Implications for Theory

Bandura described his Social Learning Theory by explaining that a student will increasingly build competence and confidence through "four sources of influence: master experiences; vicarious experiences; social persuasion; and physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 2019)" (Deri, 2022, p. 21). For an educator to provide a student with these influences, they must be effective at teaching the skill, give their students the opportunity to practice what they have learned, provide encouraging and productive feedback, and share why learning the skill is important (Deri, 2022). More simply, from the student's perspective, students need knowledge, practice, feedback, and motivation to learn effectively (O'Rorke, 2006).

This research has provided support for the theoretical proposals of Bandura (2019), Deri (2022), and O'Rorke (2006). The English writing success of the L2 international case study participants in this research seemed highly dependent on those four sources of influence. Their early exposure to English and the priority that their schools put on writing relative to knowledge acquisition impacted their foundation of English writing skills. They had limited practice with writing throughout their education before coming to the United States, which also affected their skill development opportunities. The feedback they received on their writing was minimal and inconsistent, and many students lacked interest in learning and developing their English writing skills. In addition, once in the United States and immersed in English writing activities, these students acknowledged the benefits of practice and feedback for improving their skills. They also had an increased motivation for continuing to develop their writing skills. All of these findings align with the tenets of Social Learning Theory.

Acculturation is the "dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members."

(Berry, 2005, p. 698). Berry's acculturation model categorized the strategic adaptations of individuals in a new environment (Berry, 1992). These individuals will exhibit one of four different acculturation strategies at any given time: assimilation, separation, integration, or marginalization (Berry, 1992). Each strategy confers a different level of stress because each strategy results in varying degrees of cultural shedding (giving up a portion of one's cultural identity), cultural learning (picking up a component of the host culture's identity), or cultural conflict (the inability or indecision to culturally shed or culturally learn). For international students coming to the United States to study, the integration strategy is most often necessary for success, particularly if the student's home country has a different set of academic norms than that of the United States. Berry (2005) predicts that the integration strategy will be moderately stressful, especially if they are unprepared to do so.

In theory, drawing a parallel, academic norm integration for international students should be stressful if they are unprepared for the new academic environment. This study generally supports that theory. Mostly, these international case study participants did not prepare for the new English writing expectations awaiting them. Many did not know about them; some had received clues about the differences in the United States education system but did not have enough information to prepare actively. There was strong cross-case alignment that these students struggled with the writing assignments when they first arrived in the United States, both with their writing skills and the volume of writing they were asked to complete. This outcome aligns closely with the strategic outcome prediction of Berry's model of acculturation (2005) and supports the theory that integration in the acculturation process can be stressful without proper preparation.

Implications for Practice

Pre-Arrival Preparatory Implications

Based on the findings of this research, I propose several recommendations to help universities better prepare their incoming L2 international students for the English writing waiting for them. The recommendations focus primarily on thoughtful, proactive information sharing.

Explaining Writing Standards

In the discussion of this dissertation, I made the point that the university used as the research site had an English proficiency exam writing component minimum score, and a writing sample was required in the application for some programs. It was easy to find the minimum score on the university's website (SCSU, n.d.-d), and the employees who engaged with graduate and international students conveyed that they regularly responded to questions about what exactly students needed to submit as writing samples. However, the university did not explain why they had a minimum writing proficiency score or a writing requirement. There was an assumption that all students inherently knew the answer to that question.

There is a body of research suggesting some L2 English language learners do not understand the importance of learning English writing skills (Akhtar et al., 2019; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Melketo & Tessema, 2012; Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that some prospective L2 international, or any international student, may not understand why well-developed writing skills are important. As we have discussed, English writing can convey information without concern for writing style accuracy (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019). To any college admissions office that requires English writing proficiency scores and writing samples from L2 international students, I recommend that they explicitly explain on

their websites and, as part of their standard information-sharing pathways, why they are asking for them and what they are looking for. This would force the university and programs to examine the rationale behind the requirements and could give these L2 English language students more lead time to prepare themselves for English writing and brush up on their English writing skills. In addition, universities should be explicit in both their graduate school application materials and in the information on the individual programs on the importance of writing skills. This would give prospective students and advance notice to practice their writing, brush up on writing skills that need development, mentally prepare for the work that awaits them.

Question English Proficiency Exam Scores as Entrance Criteria

On a related point, all of these students acknowledged that they struggled in some way with their English writing when they arrived in the United States, and their initial writing assignments supported those statements with significant errors in language use, mechanics, vocabulary, and plagiarism. Had they not received some focused, directed feedback on their writing once they had arrived, some of these students may not have been successful in their programs. However, all of these students met the minimum requirements on the writing component of their English proficiency exam. This study did not set out to make this correlation. However, at face value, that information supports those researchers who reported that English proficiency exam scores were unrelated to academic success (Curle et al., 2020; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015).

Even though most academic higher education programs in the United States require some form of English proficiency exam for certain L2 international students (Wood, 2022), that does not mean it must continue. I recommend that this and other universities examine this practice. Students at higher education institutions in the United States must be fluent in English. However,

an English proficiency exam score should not be used as a criterion for entrance into an academic program. Interviews with students and discussions about writing skills, challenges, and interests, even if as an addition to an English proficiency exam, may be a good option. The English proficiency exam minimum score requirements also gave many of the students in this study the impression that if they met the required score, they would have all skills they needed to be successful. This interpretation of the requirement was misleading.

Pre-Arrival English Writing Preparation

As mentioned in the findings, these L2 international student case participants, for the most part, did nothing to prepare for English writing before coming to the United States. They may have received some clues that writing would be important, but it did not concern them more than the other forms of communication they were expected to engage in. This is similar to other research that showed the prioritization of reading, listening, and speaking (Altinmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ceylan, 2019). If a graduate program values writing skills, or if the discipline involves a significant amount of professional writing, or if the faculty plans to give their students a lot of writing, they should prepare them in advance. There are numerous ways that universities could help students prepare. I recommend putting together a pre-arrival packet dedicated to writing. It could include YouTube videos on plagiarism, a training guide on a particular writing style, remedial basics on punctuation, capitalization, and other mechanics, a book on United States colloquialisms, and a set of expectations around what they might experience when they arrive (to name a few).

Post-Arrival Support Implications

Actively supporting L2 international students with their English writing development after they arrive is equally important. I have several suggestions from the findings of this on steps faculty can take to help these students continue to develop their English writing skills.

Opportunities to Write with Feedback

As stated repeatedly, the L2 international student case participants struggled with their writing assignments when they first arrived but improved over time and were motivated to continue to develop as writers. The theoretical framework of this study included Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which resulted in a teaching paradigm where students needed education, practice, feedback, and motivation to succeed (O'Rorke, 2006). These students seem naturally motivated, so the instructors need to provide them with education, practice, and feedback. Based on the findings from this study, minimal assumptions should be made on the writing skill level they will arrive with. I recommend either a writing class or a first-semester discipline-specific class with significant writing in it to help them rebuild their foundation. The class should follow a scaffolded approach (Faraj, 2015) where the instructor starts with the basic principles (including a detailed lecture on source referencing and plagiarism) and moves on to a step-by-step writing assignment with detailed feedback provided along the way (e.g., outline, single-section draft, draft paper, final paper). This is similar to other published L2 English language learning models (Cook, 2016; Forbes, 2021; Nassaji & Kartchava, 2017). The instructor should include direct corrective feedback, showing the students how to correct their errors (Endley & Karim, 2022), and face-to-face options to explain the feedback (Bawa & Watson, 2017). This engagement with students should feel academically engaging and assist with acculturation by promoting a sense of belonging to students entering a new culture (Berry,

2005). Including peer feedback in the process would also allow the students to learn from each other.

Establish Connections to Formal Writing Support

There is another opportunity for support related to this that can be implied from the findings of this study. From this research and existing literature, we know that L2 English language writing learners want to practice writing, and feedback helps them develop their writing skills. I have also reported that the formal writing support services these students had available were grossly underutilized. Many students mentioned that they had thought about it or should try it but never got around to it. In the course I described above, or in some other course, I recommend that instructors give students the assignment of signing up for a session at the university writing center or an online tutor. Son (2022) reported that instructors can be significant sources of help for L2 students with their writing by finding them the support they need. They could follow it up with a reflection on what they learned, how it helped them, or how it did not add value. Not only should it ultimately help the student with support and development, but it could also be good feedback for the writing support services. Likewise, writing centers should put a specific focus on reaching international students and tailoring support to their particular needs.

Low Stakes Writing with Visibility to Other Writers

The findings from this research suggested that some students found writing on a discussion board was an effective method to practice their writing skills. Not only did they have another opportunity to write, but they were also allowed to participate in a discussion where they could take time to thoroughly think through their ideas before expressing them. In addition, these students stated that writing with their peers was beneficial because they learned from seeing how

others wrote, and they gained inspiration from those students who were more developed than they were. This practice is supported by the research that demonstrated peer review of writing had benefits for both the writer and the reviewer (Bolourchi & Soleimani, 2021; Farrah, 2021; Ho, 2015; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Tai et al., 2015). I recommend including this type of low stakes writing opportunity within a course to provide additional opportunities for practice and review of other students' work.

Implications for Research

The findings from this study and the practical implications I proposed will provide helpful insight for faculty and staff that support L2 international students and their English writing. However, considering the limitations of this study, the growing number of international students coming to the United States for advanced education (Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2021, 2022), and the existing literature on these topics, several research areas deserve further exploration.

The data from this study showed that the cross-case alignment was very tight, meaning that the participants' overall actions, influences, and outcomes were strikingly aligned (Yin, 2014), making the results more generalizable. Although the participants in this holistic multi-case study were all students whose early English writing experiences occurred in unique contexts, their post-arrival experiences in the United States were at the same university, and the same professor taught their writing-intensive communications class. In addition, all the students came from and went into a STEM field. So, the generalizability should be viewed from that lens. Even though I believe these findings are meaningful and valuable, future researchers could examine the experiences of L2 English language learners in other disciplines to look at further cross-case alignment and greater generalizability of these findings.

Similarly, if I had the time and resources to rerun this study, I could keep my case participants from STEM graduate programs but look across several universities and intentionally enroll a sampling of L2 English language learners from four or five different countries. This sampling design would increase the generalizability confidence. I would not have access to as many writing samples for each participant, as they obviously would not have all been enrolled in one of my communications classes. However, I could pursue other options for finding more current writing samples after they had spent time in the United States.

Another interesting area of research is looking more closely at the English proficiency exam. As mentioned earlier, many L2 international student case participants invested in preparing for their English proficiency exams. Some by taking formal courses and some by self-studying with YouTube videos and online assistance. Unsurprisingly, a student would invest in preparing for an entrance exam. The unusual finding was that students viewed taking the test as an opportunity to prepare for the United States education system, to see what portions of English language skills were most important, and to evaluate themselves on the areas of the English language in which they are weak. I also commented that this might not be the best strategy for L2 international students, as some English proficiency exams do not cover all the areas of English that will be important once the students start school (Bai & Wang, 2020). It would be interesting to understand the degree to which L2 international students use English proficiency exams for these purposes. A survey-based study asking questions about the preparation for and purpose of the English proficiency exam would give admissions advisors talking points about the optimal and suboptimal ways a student might prepare for college in the United States.

Other areas that researchers could pursue are those looking at the most influential early education factors for L2 English writing learners. This study provided several findings

demonstrating the actions and influences that resulted in how L2 English writing students manage their writing assignments when they come to the United States. While several actions and influences were suggested, none were quantified. Many studies could be proposed looking at the predictive relationship between the historical experiences of L2 international students and the writing quality of the first paper they write after coming to the United States. Using a modified scoring method derived from Jacobs et al. (1981) to measure errors in language use, mechanics, vocabulary, and source referencing, a researcher could compare the writing quality of first-semester L2 international students to the following variables:

1. English proficiency overall score
2. English proficiency writing component score
3. English proficiency preparation time
4. GPA
5. Number of English language papers written in-home institutions
6. Utilization of university-provided preparation packet (versus not)
7. Informed during admissions interview that writing will be important (versus not)

Finally, there is a lot of potential for testing the tenets of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and the practical efficacy of the different options. Within a communications class like the one referred to in this paper, a researcher could run an interventional study looking at the writing quality of student papers before and after a particular intervention. For example, the whole class could be taught a didactic refresher on English language use, mechanics, and vocabulary over three weeks. At the same time, half the class could be randomly chosen to be included in a mandatory online discussion group where students give each other constructive feedback on their writing for six weeks. The researcher could compare a writing sample in the first week to a

writing sample in the sixth week. These results would give an overall improvement from the didactic refresher and an incremental improvement from the discussion board feedback exercise.

The findings of this research demonstrated that L2 international students are motivated to improve their English writing skills continually. Ongoing research on the best way to support them is a valuable investment.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I started with a review of the body of this dissertation. I then reiterated my three overarching research questions. I explained how the data from this research study provided sufficient evidence to provide interesting and meaningful answers to all three with common themes and cross-case conclusions from interview and document analysis data that supported the findings. In the discussion section, I shared how my study's findings related back to the existing research on this topic and presented my interpretation and opinions on the findings. Next, I shared the limitations of this study relative to myself as the researcher and the population of students I students. I then discussed the implications of this study to Social Learning Theory and Acculturation Theory, followed by a discussion of the implication of this study, the practice of recruiting and supporting L2 English language international students. Finally, I suggested additional areas for research that could come from this research.

The findings from this study provided an evaluation of how L2 international graduate students' preparedness for English writing influenced their transition to graduate-level writing in the United States. Specifically, I reviewed the early and home country English writing education of 13 L2 English language international students and their preparation for coming to the United States to pursue further graduate education. International students who came to the United States as L2 English language learners had a primary education and secondary education with a limited

emphasis on English, despite their attendance at English-medium schools. English writing education was a low priority and negatively impacted their English writing skill level at the post-secondary level. L2 International graduate students made the decision to come to the United States with a relatively short lead time and did not prepare for the English writing waiting for them. However, they focused their energy on preparing for their English proficiency exam. Upon arrival, these L2 international students struggled with their initial writing assignments and had ongoing issues with vocabulary, plagiarism, and the length of time it took them to write. Despite these challenges, these L2 international students improved their English writing abilities, enjoyed English writing, and were motivated to improve further. They knew what support systems helped them improve their writing skills, including feedback, practice, and group work. Providing English writing expectations to prospective and recently admitted L2 international students and finding opportunities for university-offered writing support services to incoming L2 international students are options for administrators to explore.

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Appendix A

L2 International Student Interview Protocol

Introduction: "Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study."

- Re-introduce yourself and build some rapport with the participant.
- Review the project with the participant.
- Review the content of the consent form with the participant.
- "Tell me a little bit about your feelings around your English writing skills, such as your levels of confidence and enjoyment."

Early Education: "I am going to ask you about your primary and secondary education experience."

- "Tell me about the English writing you were taught in primary and secondary school."
- "What priority did your primary and secondary school English teachers put on writing compared to reading, speaking, and listening?"
- "How much did your primary and secondary school teachers discuss the importance of writing?"
- "In primary and secondary school, tell me about what you learned about the mechanics of English writing, such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing."
- "In primary and secondary school, tell me about what you learned about English writing language use, such as verb tenses, prepositions, articles, and pronouns."
- "In primary and secondary school, tell me about what you learned about English vocabulary, such as the correct words to use to effectively convey your meaning in writing."
- "In primary and secondary school, tell me what you learned about plagiarism and referencing your source materials when writing."
- "How well did your primary and secondary English education prepare you for writing in college?"

Post-secondary Writing Education: "I am going to ask you about your writing experiences in college."

- "Tell me about your undergraduate English writing classes at your home institution (if you took any)."
- "How was your English academic writing graded at your home institution?"
- "How much practice did you get with your English writing before coming to the United States?"
- "What type of written or oral feedback do you remember receiving on your English writing?"
- "What priority did your college instructors put on writing compared to knowledge acquisition, such as memorizing facts?"
- "What priority did your college instructors put on writing compared to knowledge acquisition, such as memorizing facts?"
- "In college, tell me about what you learned about the mechanics of English writing, such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing."
- "In college, tell me about what you learned about English writing language use, such as verb tenses, prepositions, articles, and pronouns."

- "In college, tell me about what you learned about English vocabulary, such as the correct words to use to effectively convey your meaning in writing."
- "In college, tell me what you learned about plagiarism and referencing your source materials when writing."

Motivation: "I am going to ask you about the importance you put on English writing in the past."

- "How much did your college professors talk to you about the importance of learning English writing skills?"
- "When you were in college, how important was it for you to learn and improve your English writing skills?"
- "When you were in college, how much did you enjoy English writing activities?"

Preparation: "I am going to ask you about how you prepared for your education here in the United States."

- "When you considered coming to the United States for your education, what expectations did you have about the importance of English writing skills?"
- "In what ways did you prepare for your graduate education in the United States?"
- "In what ways did you prepare for English writing before coming to the United States?"
- "What did people (from your home country or from the United States) tell you about the importance of English writing when you came to study here?"
- "When you did your research on universities to apply to for graduate school, what references did you see regarding writing skills?"
- "When you took your English proficiency examination, how well did you do with the writing portion?"

Current State: "I am going to ask you about your current thoughts on English writing."

- "How successful have you been with your English writing while studying in the United States?"
- "What have been the most challenging components of English writing while studying in the United States? Mechanics? Language use? Vocabulary? Plagiarism?"
- "How much have you enjoyed or disliked English writing while studying in the United States?"
- "Have your English writing abilities influenced your success in any of your coursework?"
- "What English writing support opportunities have you used since arriving in the US?"
- "Have your English writing abilities influenced your success in any of your coursework?"
- "When it comes to English writing, is there anything you wish you had known before coming here to study?"

Wrap-up: "Thank you for participating in this research."

- "Is there anything I did not ask about this topic that you think I should know?"
- "Do you have any questions for me?"

Appendix B

SCSU Employee Questions

Introduction: "Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study."

- Re-introduce yourself and build some report with the participant.
- Review the project with the participant.
- Review the content of the consent form with the participant.

Student's Role: "I am going to ask you some questions about your perspective on how graduate students prepare for English writing before coming to the United States to study and what they do after they arrive."

- "What types of questions do you receive from prospective international students regarding English writing competency?"
- "When we ask prospective international graduate students to submit writing samples as part of their application process, what questions or concerns do you receive from them?"
- "What resources do you see L2 international graduate students utilizing relative to English writing once they come to our university?"
- "What feedback have you heard from faculty of L2 international graduate students on their English writing?"

University's Role: "I am going to ask you some questions about your perspective on how we prepare international students for studying at our university."

- "In recruitment activities or materials, to what extent does the university communicate that we will expect a certain level of English writing skills?"
- "In the application process, to what degree does the university communicate that there is a level of writing skills we will expect from them when they get here?"
- "What level of importance do we put on English writing when we consider international students for graduate school admissions?"
- "When we ask students to submit writing samples as part of their application, how frequently is their writing a barrier to their acceptance?"
- "What resources do we offer L2 international graduate students with their English writing?"
- "What resources could or should we offer L2 international graduate students with their English writing?"

Wrap-up: "Thank you for participating in this research."

- "Is there anything I did not ask about this topic that you think I should know?"
- "Do you have any questions for me?"

Appendix C

Original IRB Approval Letter

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
720 4th Avenue South AS 101, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Date: May 16, 2023

Name: William Collis-Prather
Email: wccollisprather@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION:
Exempt

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects.

PROJECT TITLE: **English Writing Preparedness of International Graduate Students**

Your project has been: **Approved**

SCSU IRB#: **40030564**

Please read through the following important information concerning IRB projects.

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc) by completing an IRB Modification/Revision Request Form.
- The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

Feel free to contact the IRB for assistance at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding for expedited response. Additional information can also be found on the IRB website https://www.stcloudstate.edu/irb/default.aspx.

Sincerely,

IRB Chair:
Dr. Roxanne Wilson
Roxanne Wilson
Professor
Department of Nursing

IRB Institutional Official:
Dr. Claudia Tomany
Claudia Tomany
Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies