"I Need My Instructor to Like Sit with Me": Addressing Culture in L2 Writing Instruction

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Abstract

One of the objectives of examining culture *vis-à-vis* additional language (L2) writing is to conceptualize an effective L2 writing pedagogy (Matsuda & Atkinson, 2008). Kaplan's (1966) analysis of English as an additional language (EAL) texts was a pioneering endeavour in this regard, although due to ensuing controversy surrounding his claims, the desired goals of his effort were never achieved, leaving a gap in culture studies of L2 writing (Abasi, 2012; Belcher, 2014). This article reports on an investigation of student views on what instructors can do to help overcome cultural challenges L2 writers encounter in an English for academic purposes (EAP) context. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys, this qualitative case study examined 27 students at a Canadian university. Data analysis yielded six categories of instructor support: (a) providing explicit feedback on writing; (b) providing English text structures; (c) using exemplars; (d) creating opportunities for in-class writing and reviews; (e) explaining cultural differences between first language (L1) and L2 writing; and (f) providing more writing practice. The findings underline the importance of instructors' roles in unpacking various cultural underpinnings in L2 writing. Also, they support the (re)conceptualization of L2 writing pedagogy that integrates empirical evidence into instruction. The implications for L2 writing instruction are discussed.

Introduction

Additional language (L2) writing scholars unequivocally acknowledge the important role culture plays in L2 writing. Much research that relates to L2 writing *vis-à-vis* culture has been conducted within the purview of contrastive rhetoric (CR), or its most recent incarnation, intercultural rhetoric (IR) (Connor, 2011). IR's main precept is that different languages have different rhetorical thought patterns; as a result, English as an additional language (EAL) writers find it challenging when they write in English, for they apply their first language (L1) specific rhetorical thought patterns to English texts (Connor, 2011). This application results in a mismatch between EAL texts and the expectations of English readers (Leki, 1991), causing an impediment to the efficacy of texts by EAL writers. This phenomenon is palpable in post-secondary contexts in British Columbia, where the international student population has almost tripled between 2010 and 2019 (e.g., see British Columbia Data Catalogue, 2020). Consequently, addressing cultural challenges that EAL students encounter in writing is important so that they are prepared to take on the academic rigours, specifically with regard to academic writing, that lie ahead.

Kaplan's (1966) famous article, which marked the genesis of IR, addressed how culture impacts EAL student writing. The goal was to come up with a pedagogical framework to address

cultural challenges L2 students encounter when writing in the target language (Matsuda & Atkinson, 2008). Unfortunately, the ensuing controversy surrounding his claim, which many L2 scholars described as a speculative intuition rather than scientific proof (e.g., Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Leki, 1991; Matsuda & Atkinson, 2008), took the focus off IR's main agenda: a pedagogical framework to address cultural challenges in L2 writing. Although this trend is beginning to change with new research agendas addressing culture in L2 writing (e.g., Abasi, 2012; Akbari, 2009; Ene, McIntosh & Connor, 2019; McIntosh, Connor & Gokpinar-Shelton, 2017), there is a paucity of scholarship related to how instructors can help L2 writers to overcome challenges due to writers' differing cultural backgrounds. Unlike previous research that used textual data (e.g., Connor, 2014; Kaplan, 2005), the study described in this paper drew on semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys, and was guided by the following research question: How can instructors help overcome cultural challenges that impact English for academic purposes (EAP) students' writing?

Literature Review

Culture *vis-à-vis* language has been studied by linguists and anthropologists since the early twentieth century. Frank Boas pioneered this research, which was later continued by linguists and anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf (Hinkel, 1999; Kramsch, 2004). Sapir's contention was that language is a system that *describes* beliefs and understanding about the world that a community shares, whereas Whorf's belief was that the language system *determines* the world views and realities of people in a community (Hinkel, 1999; Kramsch, 2004). These two perspectives provide early accounts on language and culture. From the 1960s to the 1970s, culture and language research received renewed focus owing to the work by a number of American sociolinguists and anthropologists such as Del Hymes, John Gumperz, and Edward Hall who underlined the influence of culture on language and language learning (cf. Gumperz, 1982; Hall, 1976). For example, the concept of communicative competence, first used by Hymes (1967) to refer to the competence that users of a language must possess, has been influential in L2 pedagogy. In fact, communicative language teaching (CLT) is so popular that it has been one of the preferred language teaching methods since its inception in the late 1960s. The core goal of CLT is to have learners achieve spoken, behavioural, and interpretive skills that are followed in the target language community (cf. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This understanding of CLT underlines the importance scholars have ascribed to additional culture acquisition in L2 learning.

Kaplan (1966) considered the role of culture in L2 writing and came up with a theory that claimed that cultural thought patterns played an important role in the rhetorical organization of L2 prose. Although Kaplan's claim drew much criticism, scholars generally agree on the significant impact it has had on L2 writing studies (Belcher, 2014). The main objective of Kaplan's theory was to come up with a sound pedagogy to address the challenges EAL students encountered in writing, but subsequent research on the issue somewhat stalled (e.g., Matsuda & Atkinson, 2008). Research on text and genre analyses, for example, has provided useful insights into the understanding of L2 texts in general, but it has not directly addressed L2 writing pedagogy.

One of the challenges researchers encounter when conceptualizing culture-sensitive L2 writing pedagogy is the difficulty in drawing a concrete set of criteria regarding what culture actually is (and is not) (Atkinson, 1999; Atkinson & Matsuda, 2013; Canagarajah, 2013). This lack of consensus has seriously constrained research on the pedagogical implications of culture and L2 writing. However, new research approaches have emerged, studying culture from the bottom up (Atkinson & Sohn, 2013) and examining "culture as represented in the lives of its individual users from their perspectives" (Connor, Ene, & Traversa, 2016, p. 272), which posit that culture should be examined in the way it is lived (by stakeholders) rather than hypothesized (by scholars) (Canagarajah, 2013). The advantage of adopting a lived approach to culture is that it circumvents the conundrums with an all-encompassing definition of culture (Atkinson, 1999); instead, the focus of investigation remains on how culture is lived and practised by those whom it concerns most in an L2 context—the L2 learners.

Atkinson and Sohn's (2013) study, although not directly related to writing, illustrated how culture is lived and practised by an L2 learner, Jija. The findings illustrated the fluid nature of culture as an individual holds multiple cultural footings simultaneously. The authors argued that a fixed, monolithic notion of culture is simply not conducive to studying L2 learning and that learners evolve both personally and culturally throughout their lifetime. In another study, Harklau (1999) illustrated how intricate issues involving culture affected four EAL learners' writing in English. The author found out how a specific approach to culture affected student learning negatively and caused resistance in the classroom. As well, students' own cultural identities were at odds with those practised by instructors, and this played out quite markedly in writing tasks and class discussions. Abasi (2012), in his study, found that members of a given language background found it easier to follow the rhetorical structures of that language and vice versa. He also found that students responded differently to two dissimilar texts with distinct rhetorical patterns (i.e., American and Iranian). These findings reaffirmed the cultural underpinnings of text structures in languages and how L2 instructors can integrate discipline-specific rhetorical conventions as a learning strategy.

It may be relevant to underline the interplay of various micro cultures and its influence on academic writing as well. Writing scholars have pointed out how disciplinarity and genres play an important role in shaping the texts that students produce in academic settings (e.g., Russell, 1997). Consequently, writers need deep knowledge about respective disciplinary conventions to accomplish academic writing tasks. For EAP writers, this need for deep knowledge becomes doubly challenging considering their limited proficiency in English and unfamiliarity with academic writing in a disciplinary culture (e.g., Casanave, 2008).

Recent scholarship in L2 writing has pointed out the importance of utilizing the cultural and linguistic resources that L2 students bring to the classroom, and translingual practices (Ene, McIntosh, & Connor, 2019; Lee & Canagarajah, 2018; McIntosh, Connor, & Gokpinar-Shelton, 2017). Rinnert and Kobayashi (2016) in this regard have underlined the importance of the deployment of "writer knowledge" in effective L2 text construction. It is important to note that writer knowledge transcends various levels, including knowledge in the first and additional languages, educational contexts, and experience in writing, to mention a few. For example, Gentil (2018) maintained that L2 writers make comparisons across languages and cultures in order to construct L2 texts. This comparison serves to suggest that L2 writing instructional

strategies should not only focus on delivering new ideas to be added to L2 learners' extant knowledge but should also tap into their existing linguistic and cultural repertoires.

In light of the above, the current study situates itself in the conundrums of the various implications of lived cultural phenomena in academic writing by L2 students. Adopting a bottom-up approach to culture study and asking student writers about their experiences of academic English writing, this study fills an important gap in L2 writing scholarship related to how instructors can help L2 students overcome the cultural challenges in academic writing.

Methods

A case study approach and qualitative methodology were adopted for the study. Prior to the operationalization of the project, appropriate institutional ethics approval was obtained. Specific details are discussed below.

Setting

The study took place at an EAP program in a mid-sized public university in Western Canada in Fall 2016 and Winter 2017. This program prepares EAL students for university by providing English language support. Although the intake size varies from semester to semester, between 80 and100 students enrol in the program each semester. The EAP program uses its own in-house tests for placing students in one of the three tiers: 1 (intermediate), 2 (upper intermediate), and 3 (advanced). The writing courses for all three tiers meet for 100 minutes per day for four days each week. The content of these courses ranges from discrete-point grammar lessons, to recognizing and producing grammatically correct sentences and academic texts, which vary in length depending on the tier. For instance, tier 1 students are expected to produce short paragraphs whereas tier 3 students are expected to write multi-paragraph essays using secondary sources. Writing tasks include in-class timed writing, take home assignments, and multi-draft writing assignments such as term papers, analyzing graphs or charts, summarizing, and writing by using sources. Class activities are mostly student-centred and task-based with intermittent instructor led discussions. For example, typical class activities include group discussions, peer review of drafts, and revision activities using both peer and instructor feedback. The writing courses use both formative and summative feedback, and common assessment practices used are discrete-point grammar tests, timed writing tests, take-home assignments, multi-draft writing assignments, homework, midterm exams, and final exams.

Participants

Twenty-seven students from all three tiers of the program participated in the study. They represented nine different L1s and 17 nationalities. There were six male and 21 female participants and their average age was 27 years (48 being oldest, 17 youngest). All participant names used in this paper are pseudonyms. Detailed demographic information of participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Tier	Country	L1
Anam	25	F	-*	Saudi Arabia	Arabic
Ashley	31	F	2	South Korea	Korean
Bella	18	F	3	Venezuela	Spanish
Beth	23	F	2	Peru	Spanish
Gaia	18	F	2	Belgium	French
Reyan	18	M	1	Kuwait	Arabic
Jessica	17	F	2	China	Chinese
Krista	17	F	2	China	Chinese
Lily	37	F	3	Venezuela	Spanish
Monica	24	F	3	Algeria	Arabic
Samara	47	F	1	Saudi Arabia	Arabic
Francis	43	F	2	Mexico	Spanish
Paula	20	F	3	Colombia	Spanish
Raj	19	F	2	Bangladesh	Bengali
Ali	21	M	3	Yemen	Arabic
Star	20	F	2	China	Chinese
Summer	19	F	2	China	Chinese
Troy	47	F	3	Turkey	Turkish
Vickie	19	F	2	China	Chinese
Bob	19	M	3	China	Chinese
Amy	45	F	2	China	Chinese
Romero	48	M	3	Canada	Romanian
Jack	34	M	3	Iran	Farsi
Nima	28	F	3	Saudi Arabia	Arabic
Sarah	23	F	2	Iran	Farsi
Steven	18	M	3	Oman	Arabic
Suzy	34	F	3	Cameroon	French

*The participant did not provide the information.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study were drawn from semi-structured interviews (see the Appendix for sample interview questions), as scholars (Kaplan, 2005) have identified this to be a useful data source for research on this topic. A questionnaire survey was also administered to collect participants' background information. This study is part of a larger project that investigated the cultural factors that L2 students perceived to affect their writing.

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Silverman, 2014) to qualitative data analysis was adopted, meaning a set of *a priori* themes were not imposed at the beginning of data analysis. Rather themes emerged via participant response, as we, the researchers, read through a portion of data for open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) with the research question in mind. As part of the open coding process, the researchers read participant responses carefully and assigned a short but meaningful descriptor for each observed phenomenon in the interview transcripts

being analyzed. Subsequently, the research assistant followed the example codes and open-coded the remainder of interview transcripts. After open coding, the NVivo computer program was used to assign each coded transcript a label and to group all coded transcripts under appropriate nodes. The researchers then read through all coded data to identify broad categories with a unique, self-explanatory descriptor that would best represent a particular teacher support that participants had mentioned.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, reliability and validity of information was ensured. Regular correspondence was maintained between the researchers and research assistant for the ongoing task, while clarifications were sought at times when confusion arose. The researchers and research assistant together coded a portion of data to ensure inter-rater reliability, which was found to be around 89% for five interview transcripts or about 20% of data. Since the sample size was fairly large, the information gathered through interviews was deemed reliable.

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Results

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Participant accounts on how instructors could help overcome cultural challenges in L2 students' academic writing were divided into six categories. These categories were related to providing explicit feedback on writing, providing English text structures, using exemplars, creating opportunities for in-class writing and reviews, explaining cultural differences between L1 and L2 writing, and providing more writing practice. Below, each of these categories is discussed with select excerpts from interviews in a table.

Provide Explicit Feedback on Writing

Most participants considered instructor's "talk" or follow-up on assignment feedback or comments to be an important support to overcome academic genre- and culture-related challenges in writing. Analysis of interview excerpts provide insights into how instructor facilitation to understand common errors in classrooms played out in students' minds. They were interested in listening to the instructor to develop a broader, socially (i.e., academically) accepted understanding of textual and grammatical structures. Table 2 collates some of the common themes that emerged in which students expected instructors to help them navigate the unfamiliar, and often complex and conflicting academic writing expectations by offering one-on-one and in-class feedback or "talk" sessions. Students like Monica, Bella, Amy, Star, and Vickie acknowledge the value of the instructor to "like sit with me [them]" to explain not only the assignment requirements but also textual features such as formality of language use, transition between ideas or sentences by using conjunctions, and characteristics of L1 writing that impede meaning making in the context of academic English writing. The following examples on the next page in Table 2 capture these themes.

Provide English Text Structures

Offering English academic text structures is another category of support that study participants thought instructors could provide. It is possible that because this study took place in an EAP context participants were particularly aware of the importance of following the conventions of

academic writing. However, their accounts, as illustrated in Table 3 on the next page, do provide insights into the challenges they encountered. The interview excerpts illustrate students' awareness of composing in an academic genre and the content knowledge related to the topic. But the English academic conventions coupled with having to translate the L1-specific content knowledge into writing in English were perceived to be challenging, as noted by participant Raj who reported "we know we have ideas about this topic, but we cannot write it." EAP writing, as illustrated in the excerpts below, requires an understanding of the general principles of academic writing and practising the specific forms and structures of writing in the disciplines.

Table 2

Interview Excerpts: Provide Explicit Feedback on Writing

Interview Excerpts	Main Ideas
I need my instructor to like sit with me in ½ hour or an hour and I will express my idea…once a week, for example, I will prepare my essay, for example, then he asks me to say my idea and then he will correct me. I should understand their culture first. When I understand their culture, I will have more ideas. I can add in my essay more ideas and more facts and like this. (Monica, L1 Arabic, Algeria)	Create feedback opportunities for writing
...more time with students when you're going to study and when you are writing in a language is not your first one, you will always find something that is not easy and you need help, more like you and the teacher, more moments they will tell you like specific what you need to improve. (Bella, L1 Spanish, Venezuela)	Provide feedback on complex ideas in English writing
... we talked about our writing and my classmates had two sentences, there is no conjunction… I don't know how to use the conjunction and he [the classmate] is also from China so we don't know how to conjunction [combine] two sentences and when we ask the teacher, he give us some conjunctions, more, however, to connect the two sentences. (Amy, L1 Chinese, China)	Unpack feedback on grammar and sentence construction
How can I write academic writing that is formal? I think he [instructor] will tell us which sentence is informal and what kind of sentence is informal, because most of the sentences that he think[s] is informal, but when I write it in China, there is no problem, so it is difficult for me to discuss which one is formal and which one is informal. (Star, L1 Chinese, China)	Unpack cultural aspects of writing

Use Exemplars

Study participants suggested (see Table 4 on the next page) that exemplars be used in writing instruction, providing students with models of good English academic writing. While essay structures as discussed above would give students ideas about the various components of an essay, exemplars would provide a big picture of what good essays look like. Furthermore, exemplars can be useful for novice writers to "self-learn" (Krista) the features of an essay such as the style and voice to be used in academic writing. Using model essays can also be extended to writing practice and analysis. Participants like Summer, Krista, and Anam talk about benefits of this practice beyond "getting marks" and suggest that establishing a "standard" of writing expectation and analyzing "every sentence together" leads to greater clarity and an improved final essay submission.

Table 3

Interview Excerpts: Provide English Text Structures

Interview Excerpts	Main Ideas
... I have good general knowledge because I have been in Canada and I read little bit, but still it's hard to find ideas in other language. But what happens is I try to find ideas in my language, Romanian and I try to translate and to think in Romanian, but you have to think in English and write down your thoughts in English and the way it should be like introduction, paragraph, thesis sentence, topics. So, in Romanian language it is almost the same, but there is not so much structure so that I find other challenge in my writing besides the grammar. (Romero, L1 Romanian, Canada)	Provide structures of academic English texts
In writing class, I want to learn how to write academic writing properly and I give you an example. I have an idea, but I cannot write it so umm I want the teacher to help me how to write it. I hope he will teach us about that and I told him it was my problem...I think this is very difficult for us and we know we have ideas about this topic, but we cannot write it. (Raj, L1 Bengali, Bangladesh)	Unpack academic writing
... it's important to know the general at first, the general information about how we can make an essay and how many sentences we need to write in an introduction or in the paragraph, how we can think about...it's very simple here and it's very clear and I like that. (Francis, L1 Spanish, Mexico)	Discuss general to specific structures of academic essays
They gave us the structure, then they gave us homeworks which we should write, then they...after that they will send us feedback and where we should improve, where are our mistakes and then we work on them. (Monica, L1 Arabic, Algeria)	Provide feedback on text structures first before providing opportunities for writing practice

Table 4

Interview Excerpts: Use Exemplars

Interview Excerpts	Main Ideas
I think the teacher can give us a short essay with good structure and let us to remember it every day... to explain where is the benefit, where can you get points to get marks, where we can learn from this and use in our articles. I think this is the best way to improve our writing. (Summer, L1 Chinese, China)	Provide model English essays
... give me some examples of informal and formal [texts] and the ways I can learn...to tell the difference between formal and informal writing. (Star, L1 Chinese, China)	Provide English essays with good writing styles
I don't know how to write the [thesis] statement, I don't know how to write the essay, so sometimes I need an sample or a standard [model] before I do some things and I can self-learn things which is good. (Krista, L1 Chinese, China)	Provide English essays with good structural components
...we should analyze every sentence together [of an example essay] and discuss about this, why he didn't write this, this writer, it will be more clear to us. (Anam, L1 Arabic, Saudi Arabia)	Deconstruct the exemplars with whole class for student learning

Create Opportunities for In-Class Writing and Reviews

The idea of in-class writing and review was viewed as a useful activity by study participants. As illustrated by interview excerpts in Table 5 below, spending in-class time with peers and

instructors helped students address various cultural challenges in English writing such as the "order" or organization of an essay, vocabulary choices, or making discipline-specific word choices. Participants noted that in-class time gave them the opportunity to clarify the confusion they could not resolve by themselves. As well, it gave them more confidence when they worked in the presence of instructors and peers and discussed a range of errors. Observing how others write can also contribute to one's own understanding of best practices in writing. Ultimately, as Summer pointed out, this opportunity to observe would address the challenge L2 writers face when instructors are inadvertently "too confident about us [L2 writers]," and level the playing field by accepting that sometimes for learners "there is no way to get how to fix this [writing]" by themselves. Finally, it also alleviates the issue of time constraints as it was reported that there was not enough time for feedback or for students to revise drafts.

Table 5

Interview Excerpts: Create Opportunities for In-Class Writing and Reviews

Interview Excerpts	Main Ideas
I like the idea that we can spend more time... with the instructor and do something in the class ... it's better than to do time at home, yourself... if you do it with the other, it is more helpful. (Nima, L1 Arabic, Saudi Arabia)	Create more in-class writing opportunities
...because we do not have enough time in school and sometimes I spend hours to try to find the correct word, the correct things. And sometimes I search and that's why I feel that it is better to have writing in class in order to measure the capacity or improve it, to have better exercise, because when you are working, you do not have much time to spend. You need to respond right away...when I see my colleagues, my friends writing, I see that hmm, I did the same thing. But when you write [alone] you do not notice... we need to have more time to learn in class and more time to review our book with the teacher. (Troy, L1 Turkish, Turkey)	Create an enabling peer-learning environment in the classroom
Maybe it helps to start from the most bottom level to take all the students to go together, because [there] are difference between one student to another one and the teacher have to cover all the points ...I think you will never improve to writing if the teachers don't tell you oh no this order, this is conclusion, this is right with your teachers advice so you can catch your errors. (Reyan, L1 Arabic, Kuwait)	Address a range of errors in-class for parity among diverse learners
... sometimes the teacher is too confident about us... We are students and we need to learn, and sometimes the teacher [would] want to teach us some grammar mistakes [in texts] because he thinks we can find it by ourselves but actually some students can't... there is no way to get how to fix this... (Summer, L1 Chinese, China)	Recognize students' cultural challenges in English writing

Explain Cultural Differences Between L1 and L2 Writing

Some participants reported (see Table 6 below) that while they were aware that there were differences between writing in English and writing in their L1, they were not fully certain of these differences. Nonetheless, student writers seemed to value these cultural differences and considered them as learning opportunities. Interview excerpts suggest that student writers found it useful to gain insights into how their L1 might influence English writing. This follows that instructor support in helping recognize the cultural differences of writing between students' L1 and English would be useful for students.

Table 6

Interview Excerpts: Explain Cultural Differences Between L1 and L2 Writing

Interview Excerpts	Main Ideas
I would like my teacher to tell me about my culture, because yes I have…many books in Spanish, but I would like to know the differences, because maybe it would give me more light in what I am doing [when writing in English]. (Francis, L1 Spanish, Mexico)	Help recognize L1-specific cultural factors affecting writing in English
…when I write an essay, I don't think the sentence is not correct, but my teacher always says the sentence is influenced by my first language, but I don't know how it is influenced it and how it is not correct and my first language how it influences it. I can't get the point. I don't know the reason. (Vickie, L1 Chinese, China)	Discuss L1 influences on English writing
I have to learn and I am working on it…when I have some questions, I go directly to the person or make some phone calls or email them…that's the way I find easy for me to figure out what is the way and what are those difference between their two manners and two cultures. (Reyan, L1 Arabic, Kuwait)	Help learn cultural differences of writing between the student's L1 and English
…to know that, for example, in Asian culture, sometimes they try to talk about and at the end say the main idea at the end, everything. It's different, but it's interesting to know how, maybe for my classmates that are in that culture, to understand how they are writing in their own culture in comparing with the way they are learning now. (Sarah, L1 Farsi, Iran)	Help compare, learn and apply the knowledge of cultural differences to English writing

Table 7

Interview Excerpts: Provide More Writing Practice

Interview Excerpts	**Main Ideas**
I think we should have more writing practice tasks…let's practise writing a thesis statement or let's practise paraphrasing. We have to practise task and then that test. So, in theory there's only one chance to practise, but throughout the week, we should…it would be a great idea to practise paraphrasing or how to quote properly, like do the writing and then have the practice test and then that test. (Paula, L1 Spanish, Colombia)	Provide shorter writing tasks for focused practice
…when I write something…I don't have lots of problem with grammar…we actually want to learn about how to write…and academic essay, this type of things. (Raj, L1 Bengali, Bangladesh)	Provide writing tasks to help learn how to write
Basically, I need to learn how to express myself, express my ideas, good summary…good examples in essays, writing essays, writing paragraphs, papers, it is difficult and how to describe something in academic way. Umm its okay with grammar, they teach grammar, but we need to improve the more the real academic writing, essays, paragraphs, quotations, describe chart. (Beth, L1 Spanish, Peru)	Provide writing tasks to help improve expression
Like he [instructor] said you need to practise writing more by putting yourself in a situation with a specific time and this will help you come up with more ideas and more sentences and that's what I did and that's why I think I am improving with this. (Samara, L1 Arabic, Saudi Arabia)	Provide timed writing tasks to simulate tests

Provide More Writing Practice

Several participants indicated that instructors can create more opportunities for low-stakes writing tasks. For some, practising writing in English would help them develop clearer ideas

about different sub-tasks such as writing thesis statements and integrating research into writing through paraphrasing and quoting. Other participants were willing to write more to learn about academic genres and engage with various rhetorical choices and work on appropriate expressions for different contexts of writing. The excerpts in Table 7 on the previous page illustrate this.

Discussion and Implications

Culture in L2 literature is a contested topic and there are good reasons for this. After all, each individual represents a unique culture (cf. Atkinson, 1999; Atkinson & Sohn, 2013). Despite this individual variation, L2 scholars generally agree that culture plays an important role in various L2 learning phenomena. From that perspective, the findings of this study provide an emic view of L2 writers' perceptions of how instructors can help them to overcome the cultural challenges in an EAP writing context. This is a departure from research that has typically relied on etic perspectives and textual data for culture research in L2 writing (e.g., Connor, 2014). Although case studies warrant caution in the interpretation of the results, in this study the research question directly relates to a pedagogical issue—i.e., what instructors can do to help students overcome challenges due to their cultural background. Thus, the six categories of support that have emerged from this study can be part of an overarching pedagogical framework in an EAP writing classroom. For this reason, in a context like British Columbia, where the EAP student population is on the rise and post-secondary institutions are looking for ways to support them (e.g., Landry, 2019), the findings of this study are particularly relevant.

Generally speaking, the findings indicate that instructors have an important role to play in helping students overcome cultural challenges in EAP writing. L2 students need support in unpacking various cultural underpinnings in English academic writing, many of which may cause major constraints in their performance. For instance, EAP students may appear to be unsure about culturally loaded concepts such as thesis statements and essays (e.g., as noted by the participant Krista) as well as academic English text structures used for instructional purposes that are taken for granted by instructors. A useful strategy to address this issue would be "socializing intellectual talk" that recognizes an instructor's in-class explanations on a writing assignment, follow-up responses, and discussions as important constituents of building an effective learning culture (Parsons, 2017, p. 75).

Additionally, some L2 students may understand the theoretical aspects of a particular concept in EAP writing; however, they need exemplars and activities that deconstruct texts for clarity. Instructors, thus, need to offer culturally responsive support in student writing, much like what Lillis and Curry (2010) recommend for literacy development. Since instructors are at the frontline of L2 students' writing development, they need to be proactive in playing the role of cultural brokers for learners, so students gain an understanding of L2 text structures and assignment expectations. Interestingly, such an L2 writing teaching approach aligns with most recent scholarship in L2 writing pedagogy that calls for implementation of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) or SFL- and genre-based pedagogy through a Teaching/Learning Cycle's (TLC) (Rose & Martin, 2012; Rothery, 1996) Deconstruction, Joint Construction and Independent Construction stages (cf. Caplan, 2019; Caplan & Farling, 2016). In SFL-based writing pedagogy, the functional aspect of language use is of utmost importance as writing is considered to be a means to achieve certain communicative functions. Consequently, students are

introduced to specific genres. They then participate in deconstructing the texts to understand a given genre's functions and how those functions are achieved. Subsequently, students go through the joint and independent construction stages as they write collaboratively and independently to consolidate their knowledge. Specific examples of this writing pedagogy can be found in Caplan and Farling (2016) as well as de Oliveira and Lan (2014).

As several participants indicated that they desired teacher feedback on writing, the current study provides insights into how feedback can be directed for student benefits in the EAP classroom. Findings indicate that in spite of the efficacy of the use of implicit feedback in error correction, in order to help L2 writers overcome cultural challenges in writing, teachers need to provide explicit feedback. As well, teacher feedback should not be limited to mechanics and discourse-level issues in writing. Rather, feedback on the cultural appropriateness of texts, culture-specific writing styles and text patterns is also important. In fact, some L2 writers may need such feedback to get them started with producing target language texts. Manchón's (2017) distinction between *feedback for acquisition* and *feedback for accuracy* is relevant here, as L2 students need to focus on *acquisition* first to overcome challenges due to cultural incongruences in L2 writing.

Availability of time is an important consideration *vis-a-vis* instructor feedback. Limited time means instructors can reach fewer students and discussion topics. There are ways to address this issue: utilizing flipped classrooms and encouraging peer feedback. The concept of flipping instruction implies that students would spend more time in the classroom "for practice, discussions, and learning activities that are designed to promote higher-order thinking" (Mori, Omori, & Sato, 2016, p. 731). By utilizing flipped classrooms, instructors can create more in-class writing opportunities, encouraging students to ask questions about various global issues, including those that have cultural connotations such as text structures, L1 and L2 cultural differences, and strengths and weaknesses of example texts. This use of flipped classroom approaches will enable students to spend more time writing. Flipped classrooms also allow feedback to be prompt as desired by students, evidenced in Troy's comment that "you need to respond right away." On the other hand, peer feedback, in spite of its limitations, provides instructors the flexibility to discuss other views and ways to develop academic writing skills. Additionally, peer feedback affords intercultural mingling in the classroom, promoting cosmopolitan and translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013) in writing.

Somewhat related to the above, this study provides empirical evidence of what Leki (1991) speculated as the pedagogical implications of IR about three decades ago—it is important for instructors to address culture-specific writing differences in English and other languages. This call for attention to culture-specific writing differences raises the question—to what extent can an instructor provide students with effective writing lessons with diverse EAP classes in mind? A practical goal for teachers would be to help raise student awareness about the various linguistic and cultural resources they have at their disposal as multilingual writers (Ene, McIntosh, & Connor, 2019, p. 109) and emphasize that students' writing performance is not dependent upon target language proficiency alone, it depends on language-specific text patterns also (Abasi, 2012; Leki, 1991). Thus, consciousness-raising activities along with focused feedback on text structures can help students overcome many of the cultural challenges.

The findings further suggest that instructors need to be mindful about maintaining a balance between students' actual abilities and assigned writing tasks. If instructors have unreasonably high expectations, especially regarding their knowledge about culturally loaded concepts such as thesis statements or essays, this possibility of unreasonably high expectations may give rise to confusion, as reflected in Summer's comment, "maybe sometimes the teacher is too confident about us." Findings indicate that L2 writers expect writing instructors to clarify concepts for all students, if necessary, by "start[ing] from the most bottom level" (Reyan) and providing feedback on writing before assigning graded tasks. It also appears that cultural incongruences in writing may occur in the unlikeliest of circumstances as the nature of cultural implications for writing are unpredictable, ongoing, local, conflictual, and disperse (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013). This potential for cultural incongruences implies that writing instructors cannot afford to generalize students' writing challenges owing to their differing cultural backgrounds.

An inductive or bottom-up approach to writing instruction might offer a solution especially because participants want "examples all of the time" (Romero). In an inductive approach to teaching writing, model texts will be at the forefront of instructional practices. Instructors do not teach explicit rules; instead, teachers and students analyze exemplars as a whole class (i.e., see the Deconstruction stage discussed above) to identify target text structures and writing patterns applicable to a task. Students actively engage with texts and contexts to critically examine various L2 writing concepts such as "voice," "originality," and "clarity" that are presumed to be culturally loaded (e.g., Atkinson, 2003, p. 6). Once these concepts are sufficiently clear to the class, the instructor can engage students in a whole class writing activity as part of a Joint Construction task (Caplan, 2019; Caplan & Farling, 2016). Joint Construction will help eliminate cultural incongruences in L2 writing, and most importantly, help students experience how meaningful texts are produced utilizing the language and context.

An inductive approach to instruction will promote autonomous learning. For instance, learners can self-discover cultural influences on texts. Sometimes students may have ideas but be hesitant when organizing texts due to their disparate literacy and cultural backgrounds. Adopting inductive instruction and analyzing model texts in the classroom will help L2 writers feel more confident about producing texts in the target language as students will experience first-hand how language is used in writing for meaningful communication. Difficulties with L2 text structures have been part of empirical research (e.g., Abasi, 2012). Hence, adopting inductive teaching and creating opportunities for more writing practices are sound pedagogical choices. More practice, with prompts to address various academic genres, has deeper implications as learners adapt to L2 text features and are better prepared to address a writing scenario, audience, and improve test-taking skills.

Finally, the findings of this study make the case that all facets of human actions are steeped in culture—individual, shared and borrowed. It is an indispensable part of everything people *do*, *experience*, or *enact*. As a result, teaching L2 writing entails the knowledge of cultural differences and how that impacts the culture of teaching and learning. In light of this, the implications of this study, in terms of what instructors can do to address cultural challenges of student writers in the EAP classroom, can be summarized as follows:

- Facilitate cultural exchanges: "*When I understand their* [peers'] *culture, I will have more ideas*" (Monica)
- Teach, support, and encourage: "*we know we have ideas about this topic, but we cannot write it*" (Raj)
- Deconstruct good writing in the target culture and discuss the features of good writing: "*we should analyze every sentence together* [of an exemplar] *and discuss…why he didn't write this, this writer*" (Anam)
- Avoid assuming all L2 student writers' knowledge about academic English writing and culture is comprehensive: "*… sometimes the teacher is too confident about us*" (Summer)
- Translate the influence of the L1 into the L2: "*tell me about my culture*" (Francis)
- Reconceptualize assessment procedures to incorporate room for practice: "*let's practise… and then that test*" (Paula)

One needs to be mindful that these lived experiences are emergent, ongoing, and contested, as argued by leading L2 scholars (cf. Belcher, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013). Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable, and as with any empirical study, further research needs to incorporate other EAP writing contexts.

Conclusion

The current study investigated student views on what instructors can do to help them overcome culture related L2 writing challenges. In spite of useful insights that the findings of this study have provided, there are a few limitations of this research. First, the study occurred in an EAP context at a Canadian institution. Future studies can implement a broader scale (local and international) and multiple contexts of L2 writing (e.g., graduate-level, discipline-specific) to enhance the generalizability of results. As well, given the limited English proficiency of participants, there may have been a mismatch between participants' intended message and what they could actually communicate. Consequently, future studies may explore students' perceptions of culture-related challenges and instructional needs and track if these perceptions evolve over time. Finally, other sources of data, such as focus group interviews, surveys, reflective writing, and writing journals can be included to complement interview data and triangulate findings.

Despite the limitations, this study is an addition to culture research in L2 writing and a springboard for future inquiry on this important issue. The findings yielded six categories that provide a culturally nuanced pedagogical framework for L2 writing classrooms. This study takes into account the keen observations of study participants to provide insights into what tasks and learning practices can enhance L2 writers' academic experience.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What does "culture" mean to you? Can you give an example?
2. Now that you're living in a different country, what are the differences you've seen between your culture and the new culture?
3. Can you talk about your writing in your native language as well as in English? Are they the same or different? How? Give examples.
4. How do these differences or similarities affect your writing? Can you explain with examples?
5. Based on your understanding of culture, do you think culture is related to writing? Is it related to your English writing? In what ways?
6. What challenges do you usually face in your academic English writing because of the cultural factors you have mentioned? How do you deal with these challenges? Can you explain with examples?
7. Do you think your writing instructors can help you overcome the challenges in writing because of cultural factors you have just described? If so, how?
8. Can you provide specific examples how instructors can help you overcome the challenges due to various cultural factors you have described?