

**UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED  
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**NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING DOCTORAL STUDENTS' ENGLISH  
ACADEMIC WRITING EXPERIENCES IN HUNGARY: A MIXED-METHOD  
STUDY**

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

BY

WAI MAR PHYO

SUPERVISORS: MARIANNE NIKOLOV, D.Sc. and ÁGNES HÓDI, Ph.D.

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## INTRODUCTION

English academic writing (EAW) is a critical component of doctoral education, serving as the foundation for success in the rigorous journey of pursuing a doctoral degree. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to communicate research findings, engage in scholarly discourse, and produce high-quality dissertations in English is paramount (Di Bitetti & Ferreras, 2017; Hyland, 2020; Starfield & Paltridge, 2019; Swales & Freak, 2011). This dissertation embarks on an exploration of the EAW abilities of non-native English-speaking (NNES) doctoral students within the context of Hungary, where English is used as an academic lingua franca for both faculty and students.

Despite Hungarian belonging to the Finno-Ugric language family, which distinguishes it from the Indo-European languages commonly spoken in other European countries, the significance of foreign language proficiency in Hungary is clearly evident in the necessity to communicate with citizens of neighboring and other European countries (Medgyes & Nikolov, 2014). During the period from 1949 to 1989, Russian was taught at all levels of the school system for political reasons, although it was not embraced willingly by Hungarians due to its association with oppressive power. The mandatory teaching of Russian reflected the country's close ties to the Soviet Union during that time (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002). However, with the political transition in 1990 and the subsequent opening up of Hungary to the world, the prominence of Russian gradually declined, making way for the emergence of other foreign languages, particularly English and German. In the Hungarian education system, English and German have emerged as the dominant foreign languages since the end of the Soviet occupation. There has been a growing interest among students in learning English, driven by its status as the lingua franca in fields of science, business, and higher education. English proficiency has become increasingly valued, as it opens doors to international opportunities and facilitates communication in a globalized world (Nikolov & Csapó, 2010).

Today, English plays a significant role in Hungarian universities, particularly as a medium of instruction and communication in higher education. While Hungarian is the official language of the country, Hungarian universities have recognized the need to internationalize and adapt to the global educational landscape. By offering programs in English, they aim to attract international students, promote cultural diversity, and provide opportunities for collaboration and exchange with academic institutions worldwide (Kasza, 2018; Kovacs & Kasza, 2018).

Programs using English as a medium of instruction at Hungarian universities now cover a wide range of disciplines, including business, economics, engineering, computer science, social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. These programs cater to the interests and needs of both domestic and international students seeking high-quality education in an international environment. They offer students opportunities to study in English while immersing themselves in a multicultural and globally oriented academic setting (Kovacs & Kasza, 2018; Novak & Morvai, 2019; Vincent et al., 2021). Hungary hosts a high number of international students using English as their academic lingua franca (Erturk & Nguyen Luu, 2022; Hosseini-Nezhad et al., 2019; Wu & Rudnák, 2021). According to the Stipendium Hungaricum (SH) records, in the fall semester of the 2021/22 academic year, 2,172 students studied in PhD programs as SH grantees in Hungary. A total of 184 doctoral programs offered SH scholarships; overall, however, many more, 304 programs, were taught in English at Hungarian universities (email communication 3/7/2022 with Kitti Nemeth). Moreover, the significance of English proficiency extends beyond the realm of education. English language skills have become highly valued in the job market, both domestically and internationally in Hungary. Proficiency in English enhances employability and opens up a wider range of career opportunities, as English is widely used in various professional domains and serves as a means of communication with global partners (Bajzát, 2017; Császár et al., 2023).

English academic writing at the doctoral level has received significant attention from researchers worldwide, particularly due to the increasing internationalization of higher education and the diverse and inclusive nature of doctoral programs (Barnett, 2010; Hyland, 2018; Swales, 2004). The demanding nature of doctoral writing has prompted numerous studies from various perspectives, such as supervisory, pedagogical, and contextual (e.g., Delyser, 2003; González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2018; Odena & Burgess, 2017). Researchers have also explored the challenges posed by doctoral writing (e.g., Badenhorst & Xu, 2016; Lin & Morrison, 2021; Xu & Zhang, 2019). However, despite the growing body of research on EAW at the doctoral level, there is a research gap regarding the changes non-native-English speaking (NNES) doctoral students experience in these abilities over the years of their PhD studies from the starting point of their doctoral journey to the current stage in their studies.

Furthermore, no study has comprehensively examined the interrelationships between various factors, including students' self-perceived English literacy background, including their EAW abilities at the start and current stage of their PhD studies, English academic reading (EAR) abilities, self-perceived knowledge and abilities in conducting research tasks, coping with

emotions, the perceived quality of feedback students received and factors positively affecting students' motivation during the doctoral journey such as support from respective academic communities. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to contribute to the understanding of NNES students' EAW experiences, the process of integrating into their respective academic communities, the dynamic changes during their studies, particularly in relation to other aspects such as feedback, managing emotions, and motivation. In addition, this study investigates NNES doctoral students' EAW experiences at two different time points (at the starting and at the current point in their PhD studies) by employing a large-scale quantitative research design. In this respect, the project is innovative, as no previous research has tried to examine the temporal aspect in a survey.

Furthermore, this study aims to investigate how NNES doctoral students perceive and interpret their English academic writing (EAW) experience while navigating the requirements of their doctoral programs by examining their personal metaphors they used to describe their EAW journey and by analyzing the support they deemed necessary to enhance their EAW abilities.

This research project sheds light on a context, Hungary, where English functions as an academic lingua franca; however, there is limited investigation into the EAW experiences of NNES students studying in Hungary as they work towards completing their doctoral requirements. Therefore, this context offers an opportunity to investigate an underexplored area as no research has been conducted on the above aspects.

Thus, the research project is meant to contribute to the understanding of NNES doctoral students' experiences with EAW in an English-medium doctoral education environment with a distinctive perspective. By enriching the existing literature, it expands our understanding of the challenges encountered by NNES doctoral students during their academic writing trajectory.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

English academic writing (EAW) is a multidimensional construct that encompasses a diverse range of concepts and perspectives, contributing to our comprehensive understanding of this field. Scholars such as Ken Hyland, John M. Swales, Ann M. Johns and Patricia Duff have made significant contributions to EAW research, shedding light on various aspects of academic writing, including language features, discourse practices, genre analysis, and the role of discourse community and socialization.

Ken Hyland, a prominent scholar in the field of English for academic purposes, has made extensive contributions to the understanding of disciplinary-specific writing abilities and the pivotal role of genre in academic writing (Hyland, 2004a, 2008, 2009, 2016b, 2022). His work emphasizes the importance of recognizing writing as a social practice influenced by specific academic contexts and disciplinary conventions (Hyland, 2004a). Hyland defined English for academic purposes (EAP) as “an approach to language education based on identifying the specific language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target academic groups, and which recognizes the subject-matter needs and expertise of learners” (Hyland, 2018, pp. 383-384). This definition acknowledges authors’ discipline-specific expertise and emphasizes the importance of academic writing skills in English for success in academic careers (Hyland, 2008), indicating the fundamental role of EAW in higher education.

According to Hyland, genres are social actions shaped by the expectations and purposes of academic communities, stressing the significance of genre awareness in achieving communicative success in academic writing. Hyland's research sheds light on disciplinary variation in English academic writing; he stated that each discipline possesses its own unique writing conventions, discourse patterns, and rhetorical strategies (Hyland, 2007, 2017b, 2017a, 2018, 2021; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Understanding these disciplinary differences and adapting one's writing style accordingly is crucial for effective engagement with the target audience and meaningful contributions to the academic community.

Furthermore, Hyland (2004) explores the concept of writer’s identity and argues for the construction of a credible persona through writing. This involves striking a balance between establishing one's own voice and meeting the expectations of the academic community. The establishment of a credible academic voice entails using appropriate tone, precise language, and demonstrating a command of the subject matter.

Citation practices also play a significant role in English academic writing, as they serve as evidence of a writer's engagement with existing scholarship and contribute to the ongoing academic conversation. Hyland emphasizes the importance of accurate and appropriate citation, demonstrating a writer's awareness of key scholars and original works in the field (Hyland, 2004b, 2016a). By incorporating well-placed citations, writers not only strengthen their arguments and credibility but also acknowledge the intellectual contributions of others. Engaging with Hyland's insights into genre theory, disciplinary variation, academic voice, and citation practices can enhance writers' ability to communicate effectively, meet the

expectations of their academic communities, and contribute meaningfully to their respective disciplines (Hyland, 2018). By embracing these concepts, writers can navigate the complex landscape of academic writing with confidence and excel in their scholarly pursuits.

John M. Swales has played a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of academic English writing. His influential work has revolved around the concept of genre analysis and its significance in academic writing (Swales, 1990, 2004). His research has provided valuable insights into how writers can navigate and fulfill the expectations of various academic communities. By analyzing the prevalent genres in different academic contexts, Swales enables writers to gain a deeper understanding of the expectations and norms associated with each genre, empowering them to tailor their writing effectively to meet the specific requirements and conventions of their target audience. Swales' contributions have been instrumental in shaping pedagogical approaches and research in the field of academic English writing (Swales, 1990, 2004).

Ann M. Johns has also made contributions to the framework of EAW through her research on how discourse communities and socialization shape writing practices (Johns, 2008). In her work, Johns emphasizes the importance of understanding discourse communities and their impact on writing. She explores the relationship between writers, their disciplinary communities and the process of writing (Johns, 2008; Johns & Swales, 2002). Furthermore, she highlights the role of socialization in writing by investigating how writers become members of discourse communities and gain access to specialized knowledge and language patterns within their fields (Johns, 2008). By immersing themselves in the community writers not only acquire language skills but also develop socio-cultural competence, which is necessary for participating in scholarly discourse (Johns, 2011).

Duff's (2007) language socialization theory aligns with the insights offered by Hyland (2004a, 2008, 2009, 2016b, 2022), Swales (1990, 2004), and Johns (2008; Johns & Swales, 2002), revealing how writers become integrated into the ongoing academic conversation within their discourse community. Language socialization encompasses the process through which individuals learn and internalize the norms, values, and practices of a specific language community (Duff, 2007, 2019; Duff et al., 2019). This theory underscores the significance of sociocultural interactions and immersion in academic discourse communities as essential facets of students' language and academic development (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2014). Additionally, the theory of language socialization emphasizes that the journey

leading to EAW proficiency is a dynamic and contextually embedded process, playing a pivotal role in shaping NNES scholars into accomplished writers and researchers in the English academic domain (Duff, 2007a, 2010b; Duff & Talmy, 2011; Kim & Duff, 2012).

By incorporating insights from scholars like Hyland(2004a, 2009, 2022), Swales(1990, 2004), Johns(Johns, 2008) and Duff (2007) , the theoretical framework of EAW adapted for the studies became comprehensive. This enriched framework provides a foundation for researchers, educators, and learners to navigate the complexities of academic writing. It allows for an exploration of the interplay between language usage, rhetoric strategies and socialization in writing. As a result, a deeper understanding is achieved regarding the challenges faced by writers while also offering guidance on developing writing practices within specific disciplinary contexts. Using this framework, scholars and educators can empower novice writers to understand and engage with the conventions of academic writing, thus they can enable them to make valuable contributions to their wider academic community.

### **English academic writing at the doctoral level**

English academic writing (EAW) abilities play a vital role in doctoral education; they serve as a cornerstone for success in the rigorous and demanding journey of pursuing a doctoral degree (Brown, 2014; Murray, 2017; Starfield & Paltridge, 2019). Doctoral programs aim to cultivate scholars and researchers who contribute original knowledge to their respective fields. Proficiency in English academic writing is crucial in this process, as it enables doctoral students to effectively communicate their research findings, engage in scholarly conversations, and produce high-quality dissertations (Odena & Burgess, 2017; Paltridge, 2014; Swales & Freak, 2012).

One of the primary reasons why EAW abilities are vital in doctoral education is the requirement to produce a doctoral dissertation (Cotterall, 2011; Lonka et al., 2019). A doctoral dissertation is an extensive and in-depth research project that demands exceptional writing skills to articulate complex ideas, present empirical evidence, and contribute original insights to the field of study (Paré, 2011). The dissertation serves as the culmination of years of research and study, demonstrating the student's ability to conduct independent research, analyze data, and make a significant scholarly contribution. Effective academic writing allows doctoral students to convey the depth and rigor of their research, ensuring that their findings are communicated clearly and concisely to their academic community (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Kamler & Thomson, 2014; Lindsay, 2015; Murray, 2017; Swales & Freak, 2012).

Furthermore, EAW abilities are critical for doctoral students to engage in scholarly discourse. Doctoral education encourages students to immerse themselves in the literature, critically evaluate previous research (Brause, 2012; Wisker, 2015). Through academic writing, doctoral students can contribute to ongoing debates, challenge prevailing theories, and offer fresh perspectives on existing knowledge (Becker, 2008; Belcher, 2019; Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005; Joyner et al., 2018; Paltridge, 2002; Starfield & Paltridge, 2019). By developing their writing abilities, they can engage with their academic community through conference presentations, journal publications, and collaborations, thereby establishing their scholarly reputation and advancing their careers (Hyland, 2004a).

Effective academic writing abilities enable doctoral students to disseminate their research findings to a wider audience (Huang, 2010). Doctoral research often has implications beyond academia, and doctoral graduates may seek opportunities to share their expertise with policymakers, industry professionals, or the general public. Well-developed EAW skills enable them to communicate their research in a clear, accessible manner, bridging the gap between specialized knowledge and broader societal impact (Hyland, 2009, 2018; Swales, 2004). The ability to convey complex ideas effectively empowers doctoral graduates to make meaningful contributions to their field and promote the application of their research findings in real-world contexts.

Additionally, EAW abilities foster critical thinking and intellectual development in doctoral students. Writing requires students to organize their thoughts, articulate arguments, and engage in reflective analysis. As doctoral students engage with the scholarly literature, they develop their own scholarly voice and learn to critically evaluate existing research, identify research questions, and propose innovative methodologies (Booth et al., 2016). These skills not only contribute to the production of high-quality academic writing but also promote intellectual growth, enabling doctoral students to become independent thinkers and contributors to their fields (Andrews, 2015; Bruce, 2018; Goodman et al., 2020).

Therefore, EAW abilities are fundamental in doctoral education, serving as a cornerstone for success throughout the doctoral journey. The writing of a doctoral dissertation, engaging in scholarly discourse, disseminating research findings in refereed journals, and fostering critical thinking all rely on effective academic writing skills. By mastering EAW, doctoral students can effectively communicate their research, contribute to scholarly conversations, extend the reach of their findings, and enhance their intellectual development. As doctoral education



continues to evolve and embrace global perspectives, the cultivation of strong EAW abilities remains essential for doctoral students to thrive as scholars and researchers in their respective fields.

### **EAW challenges NNES doctoral students face during their doctoral studies**

The key findings of the selected studies provide an understanding of the multifaceted challenges novice NNES scholars face during their EAW journey. These challenges are illuminated by overarching themes such as vocabulary, grammar, syntax, critical thinking, paraphrasing, coherent presentation of ideas, ability to write literature reviews, knowledge of research and research methodologies, English academic reading, feedback, explicit instruction, emotional challenges, and motivation (Aitchison et al., 2012; Almatarneh et al., 2018; Chatterjee-Padmanabhan & Nielsen, 2018; Jomaa & Bidin, 2017; Lin & Morrison, 2021; Odena & Burgess, 2017).

The inseparable nature of these themes echoes the views of scholars such as Ken Hyland (2004a, 2008, 2009, 2016b, 2022), who defines EAW as an educational approach focused on identifying specific language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills pertinent to target academic groups. Hyland's framework acknowledges learners' subject-matter needs and expertise, highlighting writing as a social practice influenced by specific academic contexts (Hyland, 2008, 2009, 2014, 2018) in line with language socialization theory. In addition, aligning with the perspectives of Swales and Johns, the interconnectedness of critical thinking, vocabulary, syntax, and paraphrasing emerges as pivotal for effective academic communication (Johns, 2008, 2011; Johns & Swales, 2002; Swales, 2019). Language socialization theory further supports the notion that academic writing proficiency is a dynamic and contextually embedded process, resonating with the discussed challenges and motivations (Duff, 2003, 2007b, 2010a; Duff et al., 2019).

Based on these findings, it is evident that the foundational role of vocabulary, as emphasized by Hyland (2019), is intricately connected to challenges in paraphrasing, underscoring its centrality in developing academic writing skills (Almatarneh et al., 2018; Chatterjee-Padmanabhan & Nielsen, 2018; Huwari & Al-Shboul, 2015; Langum & Sullivan, 2017). Grammatical competence, highlighted by Hyland (Hyland, 2014, 2019), greatly influences the clarity and overall quality of academic writing, influencing its perception within the academic community (Badenhorst & Xu, 2016; Huwari & Al-Shboul, 2015; Wang & Parr, 2021). Syntax, intimately linked to vocabulary, influences the construction of clear and grammatically sound

sentences, crucial elements in coherence and flow (Lei & Hu, 2019; Ma, 2019; Rezaei & Seyri, 2019; Xu & Zhang, 2019).

The sophisticated relationship between the ability to critically engage with the literature, vocabulary, and syntax becomes apparent, showcasing their collective role in presenting complex ideas and arguments effectively. Challenges in paraphrasing, discussed by Hyland (2008, 2014) and aligned with Swales' genre analysis, demonstrate the interconnectedness of vocabulary and critical thinking (Hyland, 2015; Swales, 2004, 2019). These points emphasize the need for a rich language repertoire and the ability to engage critically with source materials, echoing the insights of other scholars (Bachiri & Oifaa, 2020; Lei & Hu, 2019; Walter & Stouck, 2020; Wang & Parr, 2021).

Moreover, based on the findings, the overall coherence of written work emerges as an important theme in EAW, encapsulating the interdependence of vocabulary, syntax, critical thinking, and paraphrasing. This theme extends to broader proficiency in academic writing, including the ability to conduct a critical review of the literature and comprehend complex academic texts, emphasizing the inseparable relationship between reading and writing proficiency (Aitchison et al., 2012; Almatarneh et al., 2018; Council of Europe, 2020; Jomaa & Bidin, 2017; Rezaei & Seyri, 2019)—a concept consistent with the discussion found in the literature (Hyland, 2015, 2019; Swales & Freak, 2011).

Feedback, integral in the development of academic writing abilities, is intertwined with the overarching need for emotional and pedagogical assistance (Hyland, 2013; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Zhang & Hyland, 2021). The studies advocate for explicit instruction in English academic writing, recognizing its role in addressing the interconnected components of vocabulary, syntax, critical thinking, and other essential skills (Almatarneh et al., 2018; Bachiri & Oifaa, 2020; Lin & Morrison, 2021; Odena & Burgess, 2017; Walter & Stouck, 2020).

The emotional challenges, such as stress and anxiety associated with doctoral-level writing, underscore their complicated link to writing proficiency and their impact on students' motivation (Bachiri & Oifaa, 2020; Jafari et al., 2018; Jeyaraj, 2020; Lei & Hu, 2019; Walter & Stouck, 2020). This aligns with language socialization theory, emphasizing the dynamic and contextually embedded nature of academic writing proficiency (Duff et al., 2019; Duff & Anderson, 2015; Duff & Doherty, 2014; Duff & Talmy, 2011; Kim & Duff, 2012; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2014). Motivation, identified as a critical factor, is revealed as interconnected with academic autonomy, competence, and a sense of being supported (Almatarneh et al., 2018;

Bachiri & Oifaa, 2020; Lin & Morrison, 2021; Walter & Stouck, 2020). This understanding highlights the need for ongoing support and a sense of belonging within the academic community, which is in line with the STD theory's principles of maintaining motivation through competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

In conclusion, fostering a comprehensive understanding of these interrelated elements of EAW indicated by the findings of the selected studies, informed by the insights from scholars and aligned with the STD and language socialization theories, is imperative for creating effective interventions and promoting sustainable academic success for novice NNES doctoral students.

### **RESEARCH AIMS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDIES**

This research project comprised a multifaceted examination of NNES doctoral students' experiences in EAW as they progressed towards completing their PhDs. The mixed method project aimed to understand the relationships among NNES participants' EAW abilities and various factors, such as English academic reading skills, research abilities, feedback quality, managing emotions and motivation. Moreover, a temporal aspect included in the survey aimed to offer insights into how these variables changed over time based on students' self-assessments. Additionally, the research sought to offer new and finely-detailed insights into students' lived experiences through their metaphors and particular needs they worded in response to open questions. These reflect students' unique EAW journeys and identify what kind of support they need to enhance their EAW abilities.

Adopting an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mackey & Gass, 2011), combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, this research project offered valuable insights into the complex and dynamic nature of EAW development among NNES doctoral students. The findings of the literature review laid the groundwork for this project. Despite limitations in sample sizes and diverse participation ratios, the literature review illuminated key dimensions: challenges in vocabulary, grammar, syntax, paraphrasing, writing a literature review, idea development, academic reading, critical engagement with texts, and the emotionally demanding nature of academic writing for NNES novice writers at the PhD level (Aitchison et al., 2012; Badenhorst & Xu, 2016; González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2018; Jomaa & Bidin, 2017; Lei & Hu, 2019; Odena & Burgess, 2017; Rezaei & Seyri, 2019; Wang & Parr, 2021). The review underscored the complexity of factors influencing NNES

doctoral students' EAW abilities, such as prior literacy, research abilities, academic reading abilities, feedback, emotion, and motivation.

### **An exploratory study of NNES doctoral students' English academic writing experiences**

The exploratory qualitative study, served as the initial phase of the whole project, concentrating on a small sample of NNES doctoral students in Hungary's PhD education system. Thirteen participants from diverse linguistic backgrounds offered valuable insights into their needs to improve in various aspects of EAW (genre, cohesion and coherence, conciseness, citation and referencing, practice, ability to turn knowledge into text, vocabulary, flow of idea/idea development, audience, paraphrasing, knowledge of research methodology, grammar, and reading to write). All these aligned with the findings of the literature review. The findings from the exploratory study played a foundational role in shaping the subsequent, more extensive quantitative analyses. By exploring the students' experience of their doctoral-level academic writing within the specific context of Hungary, this study laid the groundwork for a comprehensive examination of NNES doctoral students' EAW experiences in Hungary.

### **A large-scale quantitative study of NNES doctoral students' EAW experiences**

Building upon the insights gained from the exploratory study, this large-scale quantitative study investigated various facets of NNES doctoral students' EAW abilities. The findings revealed the progression in self-assessed EAW as well as research abilities throughout the doctoral program, clarifying the pivotal role of academic years in developing these abilities. The participants, who initially demonstrated high self-assessed scores in English literacy and academic writing aligned with doctoral-level expectations, exhibited significant improvement in academic writing abilities over time, particularly in literature review writing. However, persistent lower scores in critical thinking suggested areas for continued growth and targeted interventions. While participants felt less confident in research procedures at the start of the PhD studies, at the current point, they were confident with their research procedural abilities. English academic reading abilities were generally strong, with room for improvement in specific areas, such as comprehending academic texts without rereading and enriching technical lexicon. Positive views of feedback from various sources, especially thesis advisors, highlighted the pivotal role of mentorship in academic writing development, and participants demonstrated positive perceptions of their abilities to manage stress and anxiety. Participants reported positive perceptions of autonomy and competence in EAW, with satisfaction in the support received from the doctoral school, contributing to their overall positive outlook and

motivation. Gender differences and English proficiency were identified, with male students generally exhibiting higher self-assessed scores, and higher English proficiency correlating with enhanced academic writing, reading, and research knowledge. Moreover, this study is innovation, being the first to examine the extent to which identified independent variables influence current EAW, filling a crucial gap in the existing literature. The regression analysis underscored that the independent variable explains up to 84% of students at the current point in PhD studies, highlighting the enduring impact of initial writing proficiency, interconnectedness of reading and writing competencies, and continuous development of research knowledge on participants' current academic writing abilities. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of NNES doctoral students' academic writing development, offering insights for targeted interventions, mentorship, language proficiency, and institutional support to enhance success in English academic writing.

### **Doctoral students' English academic writing experiences through metaphor analysis**

The metaphorical study explored NNES doctoral students' conceptualizations of EAW experiences. Through vivid metaphors, such as “building a Jenga tower under a wooden bridge using fish that can only be caught in fresh water from 6 am to 7 pm in the fall,” this study added a creative and in-depth layer to the understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of academic writing. The struggles NNES doctoral students coped with in EAW could also be seen in metaphors such as “trying not to sink with the ship.” Students' willingness to contribute to their academic communities and their expectation that their contribution would be valuable could also be seen in metaphors such as “serving a good meal on the table that the guests can enjoy!” The metaphorical lens complemented the quantitative findings and provided nuanced insights into the complex and dynamic dimensions of NNES doctoral students' journeys as part of their academic writing process. Moreover, this study revealed new conceptual metaphors that were not found in the literature, indicating that NNES doctoral students in 65 PhD programs using 49 mother tongues perceived their academic experience in the EAW journey differently. This metaphor analysis complemented the findings of both the exploratory study and the large-scale quantitative study in meaningful ways.

### **A study of doctoral students' supports needs in English academic writing: A qualitative analysis**

This qualitative study revealed the specific types of support the students believed to be essential for enhancing their EAW performance. By illuminating students' individual perspectives and

needs, this study shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of support required in the context of doctoral-level academic writing. Findings emphasized the demand for explicit instruction and personalized support. A third (33.46%) of the 255 participants needed formal instructions to enhance language proficiency, academic lexicon, grammar, and critical thinking. Additionally, 37.79% wanted timely feedback from various sources such as advisors, mentors, research experts, peers, and doctoral course instructors. Moreover, 17.67% believed they were solely responsible for their doctoral writing and relied on increased practice, literature engagement, motivation, and hard work. Another 3.76% expressed satisfaction with their current writing abilities and the support received from their PhD programs. A small percentage of students identified specific needs: 3.01% required training in research literacy, 2.26% sought more time, 1.13% desired access to all necessary academic resources, and 0.75% hoped for financial support. These findings highlight diverse needs of academic writing supports novice academic writers needs and emphasize the importance of tailored support mechanisms for NNES doctoral students, in line with findings of the overview of the literature, the exploratory study, the large-scale survey, as well as the metaphor and the needs analysis.

Overall, this research project provides a comprehensive picture of NNES doctoral students' EAW journey, encompassing exploratory insights, quantitative findings, metaphorical representations, and specific support needs. Emphasizing the challenges, complexities, and evolving nature of EAW, the project underscores the importance of tailored interventions, mentorship, and structured EAW courses in doctoral programs. The findings contribute to both theoretical frameworks and practical considerations for supporting NNES doctoral students in their academic writing endeavors. The research emphasizes the ongoing efforts required to create a supportive environment conducive to the academic success of NNES doctoral students as they become bona fide members of their research communities.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The implications drawn from this research underscore the critical need for tailored pedagogical approaches and comprehensive support systems in doctoral programs to enhance NNES doctoral students English academic writing abilities. Understanding and acknowledging the challenges they face is fundamental to provide them with effective support and foster their academic writing proficiency. NNES students need EAW instruction tailored to their needs over time.

Prospective NNES doctoral students should be adequately prepared for the demands of PhD studies, especially in terms of academic writing. Pre-entry courses or workshops focusing on academic English, critical thinking, and research skills can be instrumental. These preparatory programs should be designed to familiarize students with the academic discourse and expectations, enabling a smoother transition into doctoral studies. Institutional readiness initiatives should commence early in the academic journey and scaffold students' socialization into their respective communities.

Doctoral programs should integrate EAW instruction throughout the academic journey. Beginning with foundational skills and progressively advancing to more complex writing tasks, this approach would ensure consistent development of students' EAW abilities. Beyond linguistic competence and advanced level proficiency in English, curricula should encompass critical thinking, and research abilities, aligning with the unique needs of NNES doctoral students. Sustainable growth in academic writing necessitates a curriculum that evolves alongside the students' capabilities.

Curriculum designers should recognize and bridge language and academic gaps that NNES students might face. Integrating explicit instruction to improve academic language skills, providing and emphasizing academic conventions will significantly enhance their ability to articulate their research effectively. Pedagogy should be tailored to address specific linguistic challenges and academic needs in particular programs.

By aligning the curriculum with the specific needs of NNES doctoral students, educational institutions can facilitate not only improved academic writing but also the dissemination of their research work to a broader international audience. This approach would ensure that their contributions align with globally recognized academic standards and promote inclusivity and diversity in academic discourse.

Institutions should strive to create supportive communities that embrace diversity and multiculturalism. Providing platforms for cultural exchange, organizing support groups, and encouraging peer mentorship programs can enhance NNES doctoral students' sense of belonging and well-being and positively impact their EAW development.

Moreover, it is crucial for researchers and educators to display awareness and sensitivity towards NNES doctoral students' unique experiences and needs. They should acknowledge and appreciate their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, respect their viewpoints, and

cultivate inclusive research environments that nurture their growth and advancement. Sensitivity and understanding are key elements in the educational journey of NNES doctoral students.

The findings suggests future directions for further investigation. Studies could explore the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions and support strategies in enhancing the EAW abilities of NNES doctoral students. Longitudinal studies tracking their progress in their EAW abilities could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of support systems and interventions. Research should continually inform strategies for enhancing EAW abilities through empirical investigations.

In conclusion, using the finding of this research project can lead to improved pedagogical approaches, enhanced support systems, and inclusive curriculum design that foster the development of NNES doctoral students' EAW abilities. By addressing their specific needs, raising awareness among researchers, educators, and students themselves, and continuing to advance our understanding through further research, institutions can create an environment that empowers NNES doctoral students and promotes their academic success in English academic writing. Collective efforts are essential for enabling NNES doctoral students to excel in their academic writing pursuits.

### **LIMITATIONS**

While this research project presented in the dissertation provides valuable insights into various aspects of NNES doctoral students' English academic writing abilities and related factors, it is important to acknowledge its limitations.

First, as participation in this study was voluntary, this may have attracted individuals who were more willing to share their views and felt more secure and confident about their own abilities. This could lead to an underrepresentation of those who faced many challenges or dropped out of their programs. Second, the project did not capture the perspectives of key stakeholders, such as thesis advisors, doctoral course instructors, and faculty members, whose insights could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the academic writing landscape for NNES doctoral students. Third, the study relied on self-assessments and self-reported data, which are subject to biases and individual perceptions. Participants' self-assessments may not fully align with their actual abilities or may be influenced by factors such as social desirability bias or lack of awareness about their own limitations. Additionally, the lack of empirical evidence about students' writing abilities, such as objective measures or assessments, may limit



the robustness of the findings. Fourth, the study focused on NNES international doctoral students in Hungary, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to students in other educational systems. The unique characteristics of the Hungarian context, such as language requirements and cultural factors, may have influenced the results. Fifth, the study did not explore the role of AI technology in enhancing doctoral students' scholarly writing abilities, an area of growing importance in contemporary education. Investigating the impact of AI tools on academic writing in English is expected to provide additional insights into potential advancements and challenges in this field.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes valuable insights to the literature on NNES doctoral students' academic writing abilities and other factors interacting with them. Although it is important to acknowledge these limitations as they provide opportunities for future research to address these gaps and further advance our understanding of NNES doctoral students' experiences and needs in English academic writing, I hope that the new knowledge gained by conducting these studies gave readers a valid, reliable, trustworthy, and credible picture of what it is like to be an NNES doctoral student in Hungary today. Future research could explore the effectiveness of specific interventions and employ longitudinal designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of doctoral students' academic writing development.

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