A Critical Analysis of Instructors' Perceptions of the Academic Skills of First Year International Graduate Students Enrolled in Education Courses

Wendy M. Sager
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/9049

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000 ext. 3208.
A Critical Analysis of Instructors’ Perceptions of the Academic Skills of First Year International Graduate Students Enrolled in Education Courses

By

Wendy M. Sager

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Faculty of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2022

© 2022 Wendy M. Sager
A Critical Analysis of Instructors’ Perceptions of the Academic Skills of First Year International Graduate Students Enrolled in Education Courses

by

Wendy M. Sager

APPROVED BY:

________________________
S. Towson
Department of Psychology

________________________
C. Smith
Faculty of Education

________________________
A. Allen, Advisor
Faculty of Education

June 16, 2022
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone’s copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.
ABSTRACT

Academic literacy is essential for English language learners to be successful in their graduate programs within a Faculty of Education in Ontario. In this paper, I argue that with careful collaboration between faculty members and English for academic purposes instructors, our international graduate students could be provided with an understanding of academic culture, discourse, genre, context and critical thinking needed for academic success. The main question addressed in the study is: what are instructors’ perceptions of the academic literacy skills of first-year international graduate students at an Ontario university? Through the researcher’s use of critical theory and participant interviews regarding the academic literacy of English language learner (ELL) graduate students, the Faculty of Education instructors at an Ontario university will inform the curriculum development of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, as well as other stakeholders in this research. Critical thinking and disciplinary conventions are areas observed by the Faculty of Education instructors as needed additional support for ELL graduate students in the Faculty of Education. In conclusion, further collaboration between Faculty of Education graduate course instructors and EAP instructors are needed to further support ELL graduate students in their coursework. This study also explored implications for curriculum development of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program and various stakeholders at the university.
DEDICATION

For my grandmother.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Andrew Allen for all his guidance, support, and encouragement with my research. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Clayton Smith for helping to raise the level of discussion in this study. Additionally, I thank Dr. Shelagh Towson for her critical examination of my paper. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ann Johns for granting me permission to use her questions for my research. And finally, I thank F.A. for his unconditional support throughout my educational journey.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY .......................................................... iii

ABSTRACT ...................................................................................... iv

DEDICATION ..................................................................................... v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................... vi

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................... x

LIST OF APPENDICES ....................................................................... xi

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS ............................................. xii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................ 1

Background .................................................................................... 1

Research Problem .......................................................................... 2

Purpose Statement .......................................................................... 4

Research Questions ........................................................................ 5

Locating Myself in the Study .......................................................... 5

Significance of the Study ............................................................... 6

Philosophical Assumptions/Theoretical Framework ....................... 6

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................. 9

Disciplinary conventions ............................................................... 10

Discourse communities ............................................................... 12

Genre ............................................................................................ 13

Context ........................................................................................... 14

Critical thinking ............................................................................. 14

CHAPTER 3 METHOD ....................................................................... 16

Introduction .................................................................................... 16

Research Design ............................................................................. 16
| Role of Researcher | ................................................................. | 18 |
| Site & Participant Selection | ................................................................. | 18 |
| Data Collection | ................................................................. | 20 |
| Data Analysis | ................................................................. | 20 |
| Scope and Limitations of the Study | Reliability and Validity/Establishing Credibility | ................................................................. | 22 |
| Methodological Assumptions | Importance of the Study | ................................................................. | 23 |
| Ethical Considerations | ................................................................. | 23 |
| CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS & DISCUSSION | ................................................................. | 25 |
| Discourse Communities | ................................................................. | 24 |
| Reading | ................................................................. | 25 |
| Writing | ................................................................. | 27 |
| Listening & Speaking | ................................................................. | 29 |
| Genre Knowledge | ................................................................. | 32 |
| Reading | ................................................................. | 33 |
| Writing | ................................................................. | 34 |
| Listening & Speaking | ................................................................. | 37 |
| Background/Cultural Knowledge | ................................................................. | 40 |
| Receptive skills | ................................................................. | 41 |
| Productive skills | ................................................................. | 43 |
| Listening & Speaking | ................................................................. | 44 |
| Critical thinking | ................................................................. | 45 |
| Productive skills | ................................................................. | 46 |
| Receptive skills | ................................................................. | 47 |
| Discussion | ................................................................. | 50 |
| Critical thinking | ................................................................. | 51 |
| Disciplinary conventions | ................................................................. | 53 |
| CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS | ................................................................. | 57 |
| Recommendations for Practice | ................................................................. | 57 |
| Calls for Further Research | ................................................................. | 59 |
| My Reflexive Turn | ................................................................. | 60 |
REFERENCES ................................................................................................................. 65

APPENDICES .............................................................................................................. 69
  Appendix A ............................................................................................................... 69
  Appendix B ............................................................................................................... 72
  Appendix C ............................................................................................................... 75
  Appendix D ............................................................................................................... 77

VITA AUCTORIS ....................................................................................................... 79
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Literature review concept map........................................10
Figure 2 Themes analysis..............................................................21
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A Letter of Information for Consent to Participate in Research.................................................................67
Appendix B Consent to Participate in Research..................................................70
Appendix C Call for Participation Request ..................................................73
Appendix D Interview Protocol.................................................................75
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

APA – American Psychological Association
AUCC – Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
CBI – Content Based Instruction
CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EAP – English for Academic Purposes
ELL – English Language Learner
IELTS – International English Language Testing System
IRCC – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
LINC – Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background:

English has become a global language within academic studies, especially
dominant in science, technology and business (Benesch, 2001). Canadian universities
have been encouraged by the federal government’s International Education Strategy to
endorse the internationalization of their campuses to further Canada’s diplomacy and
trade (AUCC, 2014). The Association of University and Colleges of Canada
Internationalization Survey (2014) defines internationalization as “institutional efforts to
integrate an international, global and/or intercultural dimension into teaching, research
and service functions of universities” (p. 3). The AUCC Internationalization Survey
(2014) found 95% of universities surveyed identified internationalization as a part of their
strategic plan. With the increased recruitment and enrolment of international students into
Canadian universities, institutions should be examining how prepared students are for
academic programs being delivered in their second and/or other language.

Many of these students who are accepted into graduate programs at English-
speaking universities may lack general or transferable English skills in reading and
writing in an academic environment. Students entering such institutions require
transferable skills in reading and writing to be prepared for the academic tasks within
Transferable skills that are needed for successful academic study include effective
communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, and
adaptability. Familiarity with these skills is required in their primary language L1 to be
able to engage with them in their secondary language L2 or English. Not only may
departments differ in task requirements, but they may also differ for undergraduate and
graduate students (Horowitz, 1986; Shih, 1986). This creates challenges for the English
for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors, faculty instructors and students in Canadian
universities. English language instructors who are preparing the students for academic
study need to have knowledge and understanding of the tasks and expectations held
within different academic departments to prepare students more effectively for their
Canadian classrooms. Faculty instructors have expectations of their graduate students’
academic literacy in English upon the students’ enrolment in programs, and at the same time, international graduate students have a perception of their own English skills upon entry into their program of study. Each of these stakeholders’ views may be very different and may come into conflict with one another through the teaching and learning process. International graduate students require academic preparation not only in reading, writing, listening and speaking, but they also need assistance in managing the expectations of their program of study, specifically academic discourse and the genres of academic communication (more on this later).

*Research Problem:*

Institutional change for international graduate students occurs through cooperative or collaborative teaching with and among course instructors and EAP instructors, which has been found to assist English language learners (ELLs) in learning disciplinary knowledge and linguistic discourse so that they are culturally situated in their academic communities (Benesch, 2001; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Johns, 1997; Shih, 1986). In addition, cooperative teaching furthers the opportunity for international students’ accessibility to membership in their academic discourse communities (Banesch, 2001; Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Johns, 1997; Spack, 1988). Offering collaborative teaching to international graduate students entering their first-year studies creates opportunities for ELL graduate students to have access to the specialized language of their academic community and serves to establish their membership.

International graduate students who are English language learners not only need exposure to the discourse used within their academia, but they also require knowledge of both genre and rhetoric used in English. Swales (1990) defines genre as consisting of “communicative events” that discourse communities use in a shared manner for the purposes of communicating. International students entering academic studies at an English institution require knowledge of genre and rhetoric to effectively engage in learning (Belcher, 1995; Biggs et al., 1999; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Paltridge, 2004; Shih, 1986; Spack, 1997; Swales, 1990). I argue that international graduate students require more genre knowledge than what they have prior to entry in their academic disciplines to better understand the standards of research held by faculty members (Johns, 1997). For
graduate students to be successful, they need to be exposed to the structures and styles of writing within their academic field of study (Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990). The present study is based on the premise that instruction of genre and rhetorical knowledge in educational research could further establish international graduate students’ contributions to research within faculties of education in Ontario.

Moreover, international graduate students require content or background knowledge of their academic area of study (Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Prior, 1991; Spack, 1997; Wang et al., 2002; Zhu, 2004). For example, students not only require course content knowledge, but they also need to have knowledge about the systems, history and politics of the country in which they are studying (Johns, 1991; Spack, 1997). International graduate students studying within a Faculty of Education in Ontario require background knowledge of the educational systems of Canada, specifically Ontario to be successful in their academic studies.

One aspect of background knowledge of education in Canada that international graduate students need to know is the difference between education from without as opposed to education from within, as proposed by John Dewey in 1916 (Dewey, 1997). According to Dewey (1997), education from without consists of aims that are imposed on students. These aims typically are rigid in nature which limits the intrinsic behaviour of students to explore and experience an activity in order to learn (Dewey, 1997). Since Dewey, there has also been the additional role that positive psychology has contributed to education. Korthagen (2013) has expanded on learning from within by examining ‘core qualities and ideals’ of both teachers and learners, and he has found that when individual’s ‘core qualities and ideals’ are met during learning that it provides value to participants and the environment in which they are in. Awareness of the differences between the external forces and internal desire to learn must be made clear to international graduate students as they both play a significant role in the outcomes of the classroom experience for both teachers and students. International graduate students need to be familiar with theoretical approaches to education within Canada that create a foundation for their own learning in the Faculty of Education, and particularly their learning to think critically.
Critical thinking skills are essential in academia and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) identify the ability of students to analyze and problem-solve as “knowledge transformation” rather than “knowledge telling.” Students are required to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information that has been studied and learned within a subject or program. Cumming (1995) elaborates on the concept of “knowledge transformation” by arguing that consolidation and reconstruction of ideas are essential to language comprehension. There is an expectation for students in post-secondary programs to contribute to the construction of knowledge through their analysis and interpretations of writing (Spack, 1997; Spivey, 1990). For international students to be successful in graduate programs, they should have sufficient academic literacy in English to demonstrate their critical thinking skills – their abilities to analyze, interpret and evaluate what they have learned within their studies.

*Purpose Statement:*

The purpose of this critical inquiry is to analyze instructors’ perceptions of the academic literacy skills first-year international graduate students have when enrolled in their education courses. At this stage of the research, academic literacy is defined as more than reading and writing; it also includes the “strategies for understanding, discussing, organizing, and producing texts” (Johns, 1997, p. 2). The rationale for this study is based on the need for research on EAP instruction and the demands of university courses in local contexts (Benesch, 2001).

This research provides an analysis of the perceptions of students’ levels of competency in academic literacy in a faculty of education graduate courses and the EAP program designed to prepare the students for graduate work. Additionally, the findings of this study may contribute to the ability of instructors to enhance their instruction to meet the expectation of academic literacy for graduate studies within the Faculty of Education. Findings from this study may also help to inform first-year graduate students in the Faculty of Education so that they can be better prepared to become a part of their academic community. Moreover, this inquiry may better inform the institution’s recruitment and selection of graduate students for the Faculty of Education, as well as
other departments. Finally, this inquiry may offer insight into additional academic support services required for international students to successfully complete their studies.

Research Questions:

In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2017) point out that research questions in qualitative research primarily ask how social experience is created and given meaning. In an attempt to study instructors’ experiences in their natural setting and make sense of the meaning they bring to those experiences, the following research question will guide this study: What are instructors’ perceptions of the academic literacy skills of first-year international graduate students at an Ontario university? The following sub-questions will guide for further insight into the main research question:

a) What specifically are instructors and professors in the Faculty of Education observing with regard to their ELL graduate students’ literacy development?

b) What do they perceive as areas of support first-year international graduate students need for effective academic literacy in the Faculty of Education?

c) What are the educational and curricular implications for the instruction and support of international graduate students in a Faculty of Education?

Locating Myself in the Study:

I pursue this study for both professional and personal reasons. I bring a complex insider-outsider perspective both as an instructor working with international students seeking admissions into a graduate education program and at the same time, as a student within the same graduate education program. I have been teaching as an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor since 2006, and I taught in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for over five years. I am currently teaching within an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at this university located in a small community in Ontario. I have been teaching in this program for almost ten years. The university currently offers students an alternative pathway to enter their academic studies through participating in an EAP program as an alternative to taking the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).
I have been an instructor for some of the international students who entered the Faculty of Education graduate studies program, and upon their successful completion of their EAP studies, they became my classmates. Observing students within my classroom and participating in graduate studies have allowed me to reflect on my role as an EAP instructor.

I decided to do this study because I saw firsthand how international ELL graduate students were making sense of doing academic work in a graduate education course. I wanted to be able to better prepare my students so that they will be successful in their graduate studies as international students. Understanding the demands of graduate studies as a domestic student has given me further insights into what my students require not only in my classroom but also in preparing them for their future classrooms. In addition, I was curious about the course instructors’ perceptions of the academic literacy skills of their international graduate ELL students and their insights into international students’ teaching and learning needs in a graduate course.

Significance of the Study:
This study could be significant to both instructors and students themselves because it identifies the gap between teaching and learning. By understanding the expectations and perceptions of the instructors, the EAP program can provide support to students to attain the academic skills needed to successfully complete their graduate education courses. This study could also inform the Faculty of Education administration on how to better prepare and support ELL graduate students in their coursework.

Philosophical Assumptions/Theoretical Framework:
This study is guided by some key theoretical frameworks in teaching English as a second or other language as well as critical theory in education. A key philosophical assumption for this study is that language is socially constructed by the dominant culture in any given society. Content-based language instruction combines subject or topic content with the vocabulary necessary to understand the topic, and it is often used in language instruction from elementary to post-secondary education. Critical theory is also a part of the theoretical framework of this study because it includes analysis of the
dynamics of power in the classroom and society as well as reflective practices on teaching and learning. Critical, pragmatic, and critical pragmatic approaches to teaching English for academic purposes are also considered in this study because each has a different perspective on how EAP should be taught.

Language is socially constructed through negotiated meaning by a social group or culture (Gee, 2015). Swales (1990), Benesch (2001), and Johns (1993) view language as a socially constructed discourse, which follows rhetorical forms for a purpose. Johns (1991) believes that acquiring literacy in academic English can be done by exposure to various social contexts. To perform as a member of an academic community, ESL learners require access to the dominant discourses in their areas of research (Swales, 1990).

Content-based language instruction (CBI) has been used for second language acquisition from elementary to higher education. In this approach, content and language are integrated to allow learners to develop the necessary skills required for academics (Brinton et al., 1989; Shih, 1986; Snow & Brinton, 1988). Content-based models of instruction at the post-secondary level are theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct (Brinton et al., 1989). Theme-based models are used to teach the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking while providing academic skills to prepare students for entry into their university studies. General topics of interest in social sciences and business are used as the content of a theme-based model to provide context to language use. A sheltered model is when language is taught within the subject matter of study, and general topics of interest in fields like social sciences and business are used as the content of a theme-based model to provide context to language use. For example, a sheltered geography class would provide the language skills needed and the subject matter at the same time. An adjunct language class would operate in conjunction with the subject course as a support. For example, students take their content course concurrently with an ESL course. The adjunct ESL course is based on the subject course material with a focus on language skill development. According to Snow and Brinton (1988) content-based language courses offer opportunities for learners to learn and think using the target language which involves the ability to critically think about the content material.
A theme-based model is currently being used for the EAP program at the Ontario university being used in this research. The sheltered model is typically offered as a content credit course to second language learners instructed in the target language, in this case English. The institution in this research offers some courses based on the sheltered model while some courses may be amalgamated with domestic graduate students.

Critical theory in education examines the power relationships within institutions to challenge the current circumstance of those students who may be marginalized (Mertens, 2003). According to Giroux (2001), marginalized groups need the assistance of classroom instructors to understand and analyze various forms of production to empower “critical thinking, analytical discourse, and new modes of intellectual appropriation” (p. 111). With observation of a teacher’s own practices within the classroom, critical theory allows for reflection and examination for institutional change through research (Burns, 2005; Morgan, 2009). The theoretical division among EAP researchers and practitioners lies between critical EAP and pragmatic EAP (Harwood & Hadley, 2004).

Critical EAP, according to Benesch (2001), is concerned with making academics more democratic to students who are ELLs to enable them to be engaged in negotiating the demands of institutions. Benesch (2001) and Pennycook (1997) both argue that English language courses should not be perceived as neutral to cultural, linguistic and discursive rules as they are directly connected to the practices of academic institutions. Benesch (2001) focuses on “rights” of the learner to have democratic participation within the academic community to negotiate for their needs within academic practices. Additionally, Pennycook (1997) and Benesch (2001) argue that critical EAP enables students to use English to be critical of their studies and negotiate for change within academia and beyond.

In contrast, pragmatic EAP has the goal of providing students with the academic conventions required by English-speaking institutions and its demands for literacy (Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Johns, 1993). Swales (1990) argues that English language programs are required to achieve language proficiency of an average native speaker through text comprehension of genres and the discourse communities in which they are situated. Furthermore, Johns (1997) emphasizes that there is a need for understanding of genre knowledge of language instructors, students, and professors to assist in academic
and professional literacy. However, Johns (1997) does recognize that pragmatic EAP pedagogy should not misrepresent the use of genre in teaching academic literacy as a set of stringent rules but rather as a guide to allow students to experiment with language conventions in various contexts. Therefore, pragmatic EAP pedagogy examines the need for direct instruction on the existing academic rhetorical models to be used to assist students in becoming successful academics.

In addition to critical EAP and pragmatic EAP, Harwood and Hadley (2004) identify critical pragmatic EAP as a balance of the two pedagogies. By incorporating the questioning of critical EAP and maintaining the use of dominant language norms of pragmatic EAP, critical pragmatic EAP allows students to have the flexibility to express their ideas and understand the necessary elements to maintain academic standards (Harwood & Hadley, 2004). Although Benesch (2001) insists on needs and “rights” analysis within critical EAP, she also maintains that its foundations are based upon both pragmatic and critical pedagogy. However, Harwood and Hadley (2004) believe that EAP instructors can find a balance between the two constructs with critical pragmatic EAP. By using the interrogative nature of critical EAP, students can find their voice without disregarding academic practices in a reactionary way. Also, students can apply the discourse standards of pragmatic EAP with the freedom to demonstrate the differences in the use of English (Harwood & Hadley, 2004). Therefore, the critical pragmatic EAP approach will be the focus of this study as it allows students to understand academic standards and develop the necessary skills to be successful in their language use.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

“In Socioliterate views, literacies are acquired principally through exposure to discourses from a variety of social contexts. Through this exposure, individuals gradually develop theories of genre” (Johns, 1997, p.14). When students begin to specialize in their fields of research, they will be required to collect and interpret data, contribute to a knowledge base, and write within the format based on the standards of their area of
specialization (Shih, 1986). English language learners require the discourse and context within their field of study to effectively participate in their academic studies at a graduate level. Exposure to various discourses and how they are used in academic contexts is needed for English language learners to develop comprehension of genres. The development of these aspects of language will assist international students to gain the required knowledge and contribute to their areas of study.

Figure 1 is a concept map for the literature review. The themes identified from the previous research on academic literacy of English language learners in higher education are disciplinary/content knowledge, discourse communities, genre, context, and critical thinking. For international graduate students to effectively engage in the Faculty of Education, the collaboration between disciplinary course instructors and language instructors is needed for these areas to be developed, so these students can be successful in their graduate courses. The concept map also identifies the key concepts and researchers in each of these areas.

Figure 1 Literature review concept map. Literature review concept map identifies the key themes addressed in previous research in academic literacy of international students.
Disciplinary conventions:

Collaborative teaching/adjunct classrooms offer students the opportunity to learn content knowledge required in their fields of study while gaining language support from a writing instructor. The benefit of a collaborative teaching model is that it allows the students to learn and engage with their content material while developing the writing skills they may require professionally (Spack, 1988). However, the drawback to collaborative teaching is the limited content knowledge a writing instructor may have to assist the students to meet the expectations of their discipline (Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Shih, 1986; Spack, 1988). An effective co-teaching or linked model of instruction is one where the content and language instructors work together assisting each other in their classes for content and writing accuracy (Dudley-Evans, 2001). Both instructors must reciprocate interest in team teaching for it to be successful (Spack, 1988). Smoke and Haas (1995) extend the collaboration of instructors by adding that time must be invested in establishing a relationship by visiting each other’s classes and by collaborating on the marking of written papers. Team-teaching environments such as the above-mentioned are often a challenge for university campuses to provide as they are considered too difficult and expensive to manage (Johns, 1997).

Cooperative teaching between content and language instructors allows students to become culturally situated into academia (Benesch, 2001; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Johns, 1997; Shih, 1986). Collaborative teaching practices between EAP and content instructors engage students with the disciplinary conventions of texts and speech, and knowledge of how they are socially constructed (Benesch, 2001; Johns, 1997). This practice provides further cultural awareness of the discipline through the language instructor’s involvement in the content classroom (Dudley-Evans, 1995). Cultural awareness of the discipline allows language instructors to further prepare their students to effectively communicate in their disciplines of study by collaborating with the content instructor. Dudley-Evans (1995) argues that students acquire the skills to write within their fields of study by exposure to the methods in which disciplinary knowledge is developed and conveyed. In addition, Shih (1986) stresses that the conventions of a particular discipline need to be taught to senior undergraduate and graduate students to read academic articles and write critiques and research papers. Many ELLs have limited experience in defining a problem
to research and gathering materials in the manner that is traditionally done in academic writing (Shih, 1986). By engaging in collaborative teaching practices in post-secondary education, EAP instructors can “prepare students for institutional and faculty expectations” (Benesch, 2001, p. 23).

**Discourse communities:**

Additionally, ELLs gain access to their discourse communities through collaborative teaching practices of their language and content instructors (Benesch, 2001; Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Johns, 1997; Spack, 1988). Both Johns (1997) and Benesch (2001) argue that students first have to sacrifice their first language discourse to meet the expectations of their academic studies to become included members. Many ELLs lack knowledge of the conventions used in writing, thus increasing their cognitive load (Biggs et al., 1999). Contexts in which words are used help in understanding how they are defined for each area of study based on social interaction (Gee, 2015). There are multiple potential meanings that words and structures have in language based on context (Gee, 2015). The failure to teach dominant discourse standards further excludes ELLs from gaining membership in their discipline, which prevents them from future publishing opportunities (Harwood & Hadley, 2004). Therefore, for marginalized groups to gain social mobility in their academic fields, ELLs require genre literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

“Discourse communities are sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals” (Swales, 1990, p. 9). Sociorhetorical networks are the communities that establish the rules of discourse to be used by their members. For example, the sociorhetorical network in this research is within post-secondary Canadian education. Established discourse communities determine the organization of texts that are based on their purpose and audience. The various purposes of texts are socially constructed to connect to language to create categories defined as genres (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). These texts are organized in foreseeable configurations based upon specific cultural patterns (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). According to Gee (2015), A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting, as well as using various tools, technologies, or props that
can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctively recognizable fashion (p. 178).

Gee’s view of Discourse is more than learning the language itself. Gee (2015) argues that Discourse is not mastered by direct instruction alone, but it requires scaffolded learning of the new Discourse by engaging in social practice with existing members of said Discourse. This is the knowledge required for international graduate students not only to identify and understand the various rhetorical patterns that create genres in English but also to understand how they are influenced socially and culturally to be successful in academic studies.

Furthermore, Johns (1997) argues for genre-based instruction for graduate ELL students as they have chosen their majors, which determines the genres and discourses needed to be successful in their academic studies. Biggs et al. (1999) found in their study of teaching writing to ESL graduate students that students required more specialized terminology and rhetorical knowledge to understand academic articles and dissertations. Gee (2015) believes that providing mentorship in the dominant Discourse for non-members should be done through not only teaching for acquisition but also for learning. ELLs who are engaged in scaffolded language practice with fluent English speakers will not only learn language skills but also acquire language skills through enculturation (Gee, 2015). In Gee’s (2015) view, mastering a language requires a balance of acquisition and learning to allow for critical reading and thought.

Genre:

Furthermore, to effectively engage students in learning genres, they must analyze whole texts and their social purposes with further analysis of sentences and clauses to understand how they are organized and express purpose (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Dudley-Evans (1995) explains that genre analysis creates exposure to the communication requirements that students are expected to demonstrate in their writing in any given discipline. Additionally, Belcher (1995) clarifies genre analysis is needed for ELLs because formal structures may not be obvious in academic writing. Students are required to write assignments that implement conventions and patterns used in specific genres (Biggs et al., 1999; Shih 1986). For example, Spack’s (1997) longitudinal case study of a
Japanese student studying in an American university showed that the ‘Western’ rhetoric of explicitness and precision needs to be taught in writing to effectively explain ideas, as it is not universal. Genre analysis requires the use of schemata, prior knowledge, of texts that can be adapted (Dudley-Evans, 1995; Swales, 1990) and applied to content writing (Shih, 1986). Schemata play an important role in the processing and production of texts (Swales, 1990). Shih (1986) argues that novice writers require familiarity with the schemata of academic writing to be able to apply it to their courses. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) claim that students must be introduced to genres by explicitly analyzing features and critically reviewing their purpose and then writing in the studied genre. Furthermore, Shih (1986) argues that the rhetorical problems assigned to students do not truly represent the expectation of academic writing because students are not exposed to the process of independently identifying a problem and researching the information. Johns (1997) adds to this discussion that the independent selection of a research problem or hypothesis is a ‘western’ cultural construct of which international students may be culturally unaware.

Context:  

Graduate students require more genre-specific knowledge based on their specialization and research in their academic programs (Johns, 1997). According to Johns (1997), students who may be familiar with one discipline’s genre may not be able to recognize the practices of another. This may be the case if students’ undergraduate degrees are outside of the genres used within faculties of education.

Moreover, many ELLs have limited background knowledge of the academic subjects they study in English-speaking universities (Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Spack, 1997). This limited background knowledge impedes their comprehension of class content (Wang et al., 2002). For example, many English-speaking universities rely heavily on British or American history and systems, which ELLs may not be familiar with (Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Spack, 1997). In addition, Johns (1997) suggests that students are challenged with course content in written assignments, as they are unsure of what information to include in their writing to demonstrate their understanding without boring their professor.
**Critical thinking:**

Additionally, ELLs require the development of their critical thinking in their new language to be successful in their academic studies. Academic writing requires the ability to transform knowledge learned to develop and form new ideas (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1997; Cumming, 1995; Spack, 1997; Spivey, 1990). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1997) propose that writing skills assist in the development and processing of ideas, and this mental process is connected to “knowledge transformation” which requires more mental effort. This is in contrast to many school practices that require “knowledge telling” through passively testing for content (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1997). Cumming (1995) suggests that cognitive modelling must be practiced in the classroom for students to internalize this skill. Prior (1991) also recommends that the modelling of article critiques and research proposals be demonstrated through classroom discussions for students to be able to produce their own written assignments.

The development of critical thinking in English through the connection of previous knowledge with new content material is often lacking with ELLs (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Spivey, 1990). Within academic studies, students are required to create their own meaning for the materials they have studied (Spivey, 1990). For this to occur, Spack (1997) argues that students need to be actively involved in forming new ideas to acquire knowledge. ELLs need to expand upon the concepts learned and studied within their fields to develop and form new sets of ideas (Hamp-Lyons, 1991).

In sum, collaboration between faculty and EAP instructors allows for improvement in understanding both language and content for ELL learners. It allows opportunities for students to develop the necessary background knowledge while learning English within the country in which they choose to study. Students become better situated into the academic culture of an English-speaking university, which will provide them with an academic literacy foundation from which they can build for successful participation in their academic discourse communities. Engagement in academic discourse communities is essential at the graduate level. Paulo Freire (1993) argues for education to engage in authentic thinking based on real world experiences to be communicated between students and teachers. For international graduate students to
engage in “problem-posing education” (Freire, 1993, p.79), they must have access to the academic discourse and background knowledge to share their ideas and experiences in the classroom.

CHAPTER 3
METHOD

Introduction:
This critical inquiry case study allows for an analysis of the issues affecting the academic literacy of first-year international graduate students who have entered graduate studies at an Ontario university’s Faculty of Education. With the use of critical theory, an examination of a social institution and an analysis of its knowledge base allows for a better understanding of the philosophical effect on those within the institution (Creswell, 2013). With the examination of the institutional role of English within the Faculty of Education and the nature of international students enrolled in graduate studies, it informs the teaching practices of both faculty members and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors.

This case study was employed as an inquiry and based on multiple sources of information: interviews, direct observations and notes to report case themes identified through qualitative research. Through the collection of multiple sources of data, this case study allows for an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2013) of instructors’ perceptions of academic literacy of international graduate students in their first year in the Faculty of Education. This empirical method as defined by Yin (2018) creates a comprehensive investigation within a real-life context to further understand the case.

Research Design:
Critical theory seeks to empower individuals to move beyond race, class, or gender barriers that have been placed on them (Creswell, 2013). Language can be placed within a class barrier, as many international students enroll in English speaking countries’ universities with the hope of improving their career opportunities in their home countries and internationally. According to Rideout and Tabrizi (2018), Chinese international students elected to study at Canadian universities because of their perception of a
‘quality’ education and the recognition attached to the degree of their chosen school. Most international graduate students within the Faculty of Education of this case study are from China. Action research should bring about change for reform for participants and institutions (Creswell, 2013). A transformative framework identifies knowledge as not being neutral which creates power dynamics within society; therefore, the construction of knowledge established by the dominant discourse should assist in the improvement of society (Banks, 1993). Using critical theory, this research creates opportunities for a discussion of language requirements in academics to all for reform of curricular goals to support student success within their academic studies in their second and/or other language.

I chose a holistic single-case design for this case study. Using multiple sources of information, the single-case design allowed for a comprehensive description and analysis of themes in the context of the study (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2018) states, “the single-case can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory” (p. 49). The theoretical proposition in this single critical case is based on the literature reviewed and indicates that international graduate students’ requirements for the academic literacy necessary for them to complete their graduate studies successfully are discourse knowledge, genre knowledge, background knowledge and critical thinking skill development in English. This can be done through collaboration between the Faculty of Education professors and EAP instructors.

The expectation of the results of this research is to use collaboration between EAP programs and faculty to better prepare international graduate students to be successful in their academic studies. Researching academic literacy with the use of a critical case study allowed for insight into the language needs of students and the expectations of faculty to either maintain standards or challenge them within the Faculty of Education. The propositions made for this critical case study could confirm or provide alternate explanations (Yin, 2018) for the instructors’ perceptions of academic literacy among international graduate students.

The research questions focused on “what” to inquire “to what extent” that the issue is prevalent in the case study (Yin, 2018). The main research question is: What are the instructors’ perceptions of the academic literacy skills of first-year international
graduate students? With this type of research question, a case study is best suited because I wish to inquire about the extent to which the academic literacy skills of international graduate students are affected by the teaching and learning process (Yin, 2018).

The questions developed for the interviews to answer the research questions were based on the research by Ann M. Johns in 1981 at San Diego State University. Johns’ original research used a questionnaire to address the areas of importance of academic literacy (reading, writing, listening and speaking) among academic courses for both undergraduate and graduate students. I decided not to use the questionnaire in my case study based on Johns’ further research. In her book *Text, role and context: Developing academic literacies* (1997), Johns posited that interviews offer the researcher: insight into classroom goals, enhancement of student practices, and recognition of specific curricular issues. Therefore, based on Johns’ work, I decided to do a case study with interviews with professors to further the understanding of academic literacy required of international students within the Faculty of Education graduate courses.

*Role of Researcher:*

The role of the researcher is observer and interviewer. What I have observed as a graduate student and an EAP instructor has illuminated aspects of my teaching to prepare international graduate students for their studies. I have observed both in my graduate classes and my EAP classes that many students struggled with various aspects of academic literacy. As I researched academic literacy, I found that much of the literature identified the same areas of concern for my students to be successful in their academic studies. As noted in the literature review, international students often have difficulties with discourse, genres, background knowledge and critical thinking in graduate studies.

I also took on the role of the interviewer in the data collection process. This allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the responses to the questions compiled for the individual guided interviews. It allowed me to note similarities and differences in the responses of the participants to the previous research done in the area of academic literacy among ELLs and my personal experience teaching.
Site & Participant Selection:

This study took place at a Faculty of Education within an Ontario university. This convenience case represents a site that was easily accessible to the researcher for data collection (Creswell, 2013). The Faculty of Education graduate program in this case study has two cohorts: domestic and international. The international graduate students took some courses with their cohort and some courses that are integrated with the domestic cohort. The international graduate students have two entry paths into their academic studies. They can provide an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) band of 7.0 in three of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) with a score of no lower than 6.5 in their fourth skill. A band of 7.0 describes the language learner as a “Good user.” A band of 7.0 is defined by the British Council (2002) as: “You have an operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally, you handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.” The second pathway to enter into their academics at the University in this case study is through an EAP program within the University. The highest level of study within the EAP program is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages Level C1 which is defined as Effective Operational Proficiency. The CEFR (2001) describes the C1 level on a global scale as:

Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices (p. 24).

The CEFR Level C1 is equivalent to the band score of 7.0 for IELTS.

Based on these characteristics of international graduate students’ language level,
this case study inquired about the perceptions of academic literacy held by professors in the Faculty of Education. This investigation used purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2013), a purposeful sample is a deliberate selection of a group of people who can best enlighten the researcher about an issue. Five participants were selected for this case study -- Faculty of Education professors who have taught graduate classes with international students. There were three male professors and two female professors. All were tenured professors who have been teaching graduate courses at the institution in this case study for many years offering a wealth of information as key informants. They have been teaching specific graduate courses for multiple terms with domestic and international students in their courses. The participants in this case study have instructed both cohorts separately and together which allows for a variety of observations to be made with academic literacy among all graduate students. The participants are both Canadian and international which provides different educational and teaching experiences and perspectives to this case study. The participants contributed through individual interviews and were asked for convenient meeting times through an email that requested their participation in the study. Those who volunteered were contacted to meet in an on-line audio platform on an individual basis to answer open-ended questions based on the guided interview approach to gain further insight into themes identified in the literature review. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point in time up until two weeks after the transcription had been electronically provided to them for member checking. All participants interviewed remained in the case study.

Data Collection:

The data collection methods used in this case study provide the in-depth information needed for critical analysis of academic literacy among graduate students studying in the Faculty of Education. Based on my direct observations as a student and an EAP instructor, I provided my personal insights regarding the academic literacy expectations of the graduate courses that I had taken with the international cohort through my course study.

In addition, interviews with five professors who have taught international graduate courses provided their expectations and observations for academic literacy in
graduate classes. The interviews were completed using an interview guide approach (Johnson & Turner, 2003). During the interviews, questions guided the participants with a pre-specified list that was reworded as needed and given in any order by the interviewer (Johnson & Turner, 2003). The interviews were digitally recorded in audio format for accuracy of information gathered from the participants. After the participants reviewed their responses to the questions in the interview, no withdrawals were made from the case study. The interviewer also took notes during the interviews to add any additional insights into the topics discussed. Therefore, the main evidence used in this case study is from the personal opinions and perceptions of the interviewees and how they explain the behavioural events (Yin, 2018) in their graduate classes.

Data Analysis:

Analytical priorities were given to the propositions made based on the research questions and the literature review which determined the data collection plan (Yin, 2018). The transcribed interviews were read through in entirety several times to identify any themes. When the transcribed interviews were read, notes were made in relation to the researcher’s direct observations. The themes identified in the literature review were reviewed, and then connections were examined through the transcripts. The responses to each of the questions were compiled based on the interviews with the participants. The compiled responses were then reviewed for keywords or phrases based on reading, listening, speaking and writing. They were then entered into a matrix organized by the literature review themes or propositions discourse, genre, background knowledge and critical thinking. Pattern matching was used to link the data from the interviews to the propositions of this case study (Yin, 2018). This allowed for confirmation of the theoretical propositions identified in the literature review and identified further themes provided by the participants in the case study (see Figure 2).
Figure 2 Themes analysis. Themes of analysis identified from participant interviews in relationship to English language skills and the literature review.

Figure 2 was created to identify patterns in the observation of participants in interviews regarding the academic literacy of international graduate students in their first year of study in the Faculty of Education. The interview questions were designed around the four skills in language development: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Themes were further identified from the interviews based in relation to the themes of the literature review. The themes identified from the literature review and the interviews were identified as discourse knowledge, genre/ rhetorical knowledge, background/ cultural knowledge and critical thinking. Evidence from the interviews was then organized into the chart based on language skills and identified themes to assist in developing the findings of this study.

Scope and Limitations of the Study Reliability and Validity/ Establishing Credibility:

The scope of this holistic single-case study was used to establish the accuracy of the propositions made or if there are alternate reasons that may be appropriate (Yin, 2018). The most significant limitation of the data collection was the length of time to
complete the individual interviews and the analysis of the qualitative data generated from them. Another limitation of interviews is the researcher’s presence, which may cause bias in the responses to questions asked (Creswell, 2014).

Validity strategies used were triangulation, member checking, identifying bias and reporting of discrepant information (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation was done through the themes identified in the literature review and the participants in the interviews. The researcher recorded the interviews for accuracy of their opinions and ideas. Due to COVID-19, face-to-face interviews were not possible, so Microsoft Teams was used to record (audio only) the interview as well as the phone responses with the digital audio recorder in MP4 format. The individual interviews were validated through transcription of responses to the questions. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher for validation through member checking and emailed to the participants. The participants had two weeks to review and make any clarifications or corrections to the transcribed interviews. Participants had two weeks after the transcript was sent to withdraw their data from this case study. Bias was identified by the researcher through self-reflection to allow for transparency in the research findings (Creswell, 2014). Self-reflection was done through a review of the role as researcher and interviewer but also as an instructor who teaches international language learners in an academic setting. Any discrepancies identified in the propositions made can be found in the discussion and findings.

Additionally, data analysis provided internal validity through pattern matching. According to Yin (2018), “If the empirical and predicted patterns appear to be similar, the results can help a case study to strengthen its internal validity” (p. 175). The propositions identified in the literature were matched to the evidence provided in the participant interviews and observations of the researcher.

This study was delimited to one Ontario university and its Faculty of Education professors, and international graduate students in education were the focus of this case study.

Methodological Assumptions Importance of the Study:

This critical case analyzed what academic literacy skills first-year international students have when enrolled in graduate education courses. This study is important to
English language instructors in EAP programs and may help to support international students with English as a second or other language learners in the graduate studies program in the Faculty of Education within an Ontario university.

This study may inform curricular development for all the stakeholders within the institution being studied. The hope is to improve the curricular objectives of the EAP program to meet the needs of the international graduate students beginning their program of study at the Faculty of Education. Collaboration between EAP program instructors and instructors of graduate courses in the Faculty of Education may allow for the transformation of program content to better prepare incoming graduate ELLs with the required academic literacy for the successful completion of their degrees.

_Ethical Considerations:_

This research project was low risk for the participants. The ethical considerations taken into consideration for the participants are social and economic due to the positions and roles of those who were willing to participate as members of the faculty at the institution being studied. Participants were at a low to medium risk of losing their reputation or status within the Faculty of Education. When sharing observations regarding students within a graduate course, there could be a conflict of ideas or views held about the program or school involved in the research. This has the potential for participants’ reputations to be harmed or even impact their roles as instructors. They were at low to medium risk of having economic loss, such as income by participating in this research. For example, the economic loss could be the nonrenewal of sessional contracts based on ideas and observations shared. The previously mentioned risks would be based on data exposure, which also would be low to medium risk for the participants in the study. The five participants involved in this case study belong to a small faculty within the university. The data collected in participant interviews could be connected to individual participants based on the observations provided and the information quoted in the results of the research even though every precaution was taken to remove any potential identifiers.

Participants in interviews were asked for consent to record the interview. The audio recorded information was stored on a secure server. All hard copy materials were
stored and locked in a filing cabinet for all methods used in the study. Pseudonyms were created for those who participated and were quoted in the final publication of the research. Moreover, questions used for the individual interviews were general in nature to the research topic to prevent any identifying markers in participants’ responses. Any potential identifiers of the participants’ responses to questions were removed prior to the publication of the results to further ensure confidentiality.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are organized based on the following four key themes: Discourse Communities, Genre Knowledge, Background/ Cultural Knowledge, and Critical Thinking. Each theme was examined based on productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening and reading) to analyze the instructors’ perceptions of the academic skills of ELL graduate students in the Faculty of Education courses. The themes identified by the instructors’ perceptions, expectations and observations were found to be similar for both international and Canadian instructors.

Discourse Communities:

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) defines discourse competence as “the ability of the learner to arrange sentences in sequence so as to produce coherent stretches of language” (p. 123). This framework was particularly helpful in the analysis of my data in this study. For example, the four skills of language learning -- reading, writing, listening, and speaking were discussed with the interviewees in relation to international graduate students’ academic literacy. These four language skills were discussed with the participants in relation to academics within the Faculty of Education at the graduate level and how effectively international graduate students used these skills within their first year of study. In the analysis of the data collected based on their language skills and discourse competence, two themes were observed in the instructors’ assessment of graduate students’ reading of assigned texts: vocabulary and comprehension.
**Reading:**

Of the two sub-themes in discourse communities, vocabulary appeared to be regarded as a barrier to overall reading comprehension by many of the participants. Assessment of reading comprehension varied from having some difficulties to others having limited or slowed comprehension due to their limited understanding of vocabulary. Professor Bing stated, “...they may have difficulties or misunderstanding...” in reading the assigned texts, and Professor Geller reported, “A lot of times they have their dictionaries right with them, so they’re really going back and forth, back and forth, and back and forth (from their primary to secondary language).” This demonstrates the varied language level within a classroom even when the students’ entry language level is at a CEFR C1 level. In addition, Professor Green also commented, “It [reading assigned texts] may also involve Google translate or different forms of translation as they are reading through different articles and papers.” These two examples from Professors Geller and Green demonstrate some students’ limited comprehension at a word level which impacts their overall comprehension at a discourse level. When students are struggling to understand at a word level, they are not able to grasp the meaning of the context that it is presented. In content-based instruction, ELL graduate students who do not have a sufficient vocabulary in the subject they are studying lose out on the nuances of meaning that language carries within any given text. They miss the context of how the word is being used and how that impacts the meaning within a text. According to Gee (2015), there are a variety of potential meanings that are used when words and structures are generated in real-life situations based on word use and its change in meaning with context and usage. Dictionaries and translating software will only provide the most common usage of any given word which does not provide ELL graduates with meaning as intended by the context given. “Meaning is not a ‘look up’ process” (Gee, 2015, p. 111). ELL graduate students do not understand the meaning of the word based on how the word is being used when they are accessing dictionaries or translating software to assist them in comprehension.

In addition, graduate-level courses typically examine complex matters and require a level of comprehension which entails critical thinking about the issues being examined. As ELL graduate students focus on the word level meaning with dictionaries and
translators, they are missing the broader picture being presented. This causes them to fall behind in understanding the larger and more complex ideas which in turn impacts their overall comprehension of the course. If ELL graduate students do not have the lexicon needed for studying in the Faculty of Education, they will face greater barriers to understanding complex concepts within the field. According to Cope and Kalantzis (1993), discourse is designed by social circumstances, which require different structures and uses allowing for access to social power. To offer ELLs social equity, they require knowledge of discourses for different purposes and contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Without the needed foundation of vocabulary, ELL graduate students will not have equal access to the discourse community in which they want to participate. As participants in a professional program in the Faculty of Education, ELL graduate students must have foundational academic vocabulary prior to participation within the program to successfully engage in discourse to become members.

Furthermore, their vocabulary comprehension at an academic level was also challenging for students as observed by some of the professors interviewed. “Some of the subtler language that we take for granted, common turns of phrase, some you know, common things that you would expect in any language learner’s academic vocabulary are absent,” explained Professor Green. In reading assigned texts, Professor Buffay commented, “Likely they may have more [of a] struggle in English because they are not English major students. So, in that regard, they are better. But still, I can see a gap in terms of academic English.” With students’ lack of vocabulary comprehension ranging from common expressions to academic vocabulary, instructors are then prevented from moving through the course curriculum if they need to explain academic terminology within educational research.

In addition to academic vocabulary comprehension, learners have difficulty interpreting the meaning of the vocabulary in the context of the text in which it is presented. Professor Geller described that sometimes, “They understand the words individually, but the totality of the sentence is somewhat lost on them so that can be a challenge.” If students are unable to understand the context of the sentence, then this leads to challenges with comprehension of the whole text. As indicated by Professor Buffay, “…they [international graduate students] need me to explain to them what this
article is about.” This is in line with Benesch’s (2001) argument that more research is needed with social context beyond text and discourse use for ELLs and such research needs to examine how it is used within communities. ELL graduate students need to have comprehension for vocabulary use within their area of study, and in this case, they need to develop academic vocabulary for education.

Therefore, at the discourse level of reading, international graduate students appear to struggle with vocabulary and comprehension of the text, which creates barriers to their engagement with the content effectively within their graduate courses. If barriers exist within their reading, international graduate students are also identified as having limitations in their writing skills. Within written academic discourse, three themes were identified by the interview participants: vocabulary, sentence structure and editing. Again, the predominant barrier to expressing ideas was the students’ limited effective vocabulary use. In addition to vocabulary, sentence structure was also challenging for the international graduate students when writing as it prevented them from expressing their ideas clearly in academic discourse. To successfully engage in written academic discourse, international graduate students must be able to convey their ideas and meaning clearly and effectively to the reader.

Writing:

Written work of international graduate students was identified as lacking academic vocabulary and accurate sentence structure. “So, I certainly expect…if there is inappropriate usage of English that it was coherent that I could read it without having to go back three times and try to decipher what was being written,” explained Professor Tribbiani. Additionally, Professor Bing noticed, “that students of other – who are speakers of other languages… you read about halfway, and you don’t know what they want to tell you.” International graduate students not only need to select accurate academic vocabulary, but they must also know how to accurately use it in a sentence to convey their ideas clearly to the reader. Professor Bing reasoned, “…for international graduate students whose first language is not English, the language barrier is there…when they write, maybe because of the lack of vocabulary and of course grammar as well…” ELL graduate students do not just need to develop accurate vocabulary, grammar and syntax, but they must understand the complex topics within education.
within their first language to then convey their thoughts and ideas accurately in written discourse.

Furthermore, international graduate students’ first language influences the discourse in their written work. Professor Green identified, …in most graduate writing we’re resisting the temptation to apply conditions on the nouns that we’re describing or the data that we’re describing. …students from other countries perhaps the languages are a bit more poetic or narrative that’s a struggle for them because they have to focus on facts and, you know, keeping that central question and that benign answer in mind.

International graduate students need to be made aware of the expected writing standards of an academic discourse community. A part of this standard lies within the ability of international graduate students to edit their work. ELL graduate students need to have the ability to engage in written discourse to effectively make sense of the meaning expressed in readings and make meaning in what they write. To do this, ELL graduate students must be able to command the use of English in academic discourse.

The lack of editing for vocabulary use, sentence structure, and clear ideas contributed to the effectiveness of international graduate students’ written academic discourse. Professor Geller identified, “…the author [international graduate student] needs to have somebody proofread the document. Professor Tribbiani concurred, “…they almost always needed somebody to edit their work.” For example, Professor Tribbiani identified types of errors in written discourse. “…sentence formation, the use of articles, definite and indefinite articles in writing is a big challenge for certain groups of international students.” Another area considered for editing was the confusion of spoken discourse in written work. Professor Buffay explained, “I think they should know how to write academically in terms of some basic requirements, like for example, you don’t use the abbreviations like ‘it’s’ or ‘I’m’.” ELL graduate students are struggling to translate the information in English into their L1 for comprehension of information they read, but they also must translate what they think regarding what they have read between their L1 and English. When going through several stages of comprehension, they then must reflect on the differences in discourse between their L1 and English. For example, many
character-based languages do not have articles as in alphabet-based languages. The nuance of meaning changes with the use of articles. Such nuances in one language do not necessarily translate to another. According to Gee (2015), an apprenticeship must take place while both learning and acquiring Discourse in another language. By providing an apprenticeship to students, they will be able to develop the necessary comprehension of the subtleties of academic English discourse.

As a result, international graduate students appear to face challenges in written discourse at an academic level with vocabulary use and sentence structure contributing to the lack of clarity in presenting their ideas. Texts used in the class should be used as a model for academic writing to meet discourse expectations. International graduate students require practice in writing as a process to revise and edit their work prior to submission. With a focus on these aspects of written discourse, international graduate students will be able to engage in the Faculty of Education as members of the community. As identified by Gee in the literature review (2015), ELLs master language by enculturation through a balance of learning and acquiring Discourse. To further this membership, listening and speaking discourse also need to be addressed.

*Listening & Speaking:*

Listening and speaking skills were key themes that emerged from the data because most graduate-level courses in the Faculty of Education are seminar-styled or discussion-based. Comprehension in speech discourse and listening seemed to limit interactions of international graduate students in discussions. Course readings were a particular topic of discussion in the participants’ interviews about their graduate classes. Professor Geller provided an example of a task she asked her students to do in a class discussion: “I want you to think of one specific idea from this article that you think is worth sharing with the class.” Professor Geller identified that some of the international graduate students would only provide a fact from the article and may have interpreted the request of the professor to recall the section of the reading and to highlight sometimes even a word or words that they have read. They might see the text or assigned reading as the authority and expect their task to be simply a matter of retrieval or reciting what are assumed to be facts from the course materials. At times, Professor Geller would have to provide a follow-up question to draw more information from the students. It is not
uncommon for professors to find themselves as cultural interpreters when having
discussions in class once they recognize that the questions or requests are not eliciting the
responses that they expect from ELL graduate students.

Professor Tribbiani expressed similar experiences when beginning discussions. For example, Professor Tribbiani asked, “What do you think of this? Can you find
examples of such and such things? How did you compare reading A with reading B, or
the conclusions of reading A and the conclusions with reading B? et. cetera.”

The challenge again…generally speaking international students
could tell you that the surface material about the information, but they
didn’t seem to be able to or to be interested in, as I said before, in
challenging or questioning the methodology.

Professor Green expressed, “I would love to see more interactive conversation
like … this phrase always reminds me of this, and then the student may say this, but I
suppose one of the biggest building blocks needed is with listening.” Therefore,
comprehension of speech discourse limits the exchange of ideas beyond the text
presented. However, some rationale was suggested by some of the interview participants.
One of the main topics in the pre-service language arts course in the Faculty of Education
is the Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self and Text-to-World connection strategy for responding to
reading materials. Teacher candidates who are taught by the same instructors are not only
expected to understand this strategy, but they are also expected to be able to teach their
students this strategy as early as grade one. If this strategy is unfamiliar to international
students, then it is not surprising that these students do not want to engage in discussion
or respond to questions regarding course readings in class.

From a linguistics approach to rationalizing the limited discussions within the
classrooms, Professor Green suggested,

…listening involves you know that mental psychological repetition
of what the person has just said that your mind is staying on track. And
then one step further in graduate studies thinking about what the person
has just said and formulating questions. And then for international
students going one step further and finding the courage to ask those
questions.
This takes time for the international graduate student and can be cognitively demanding which could in turn limit their reaction time to participate in the class discussion. As a result, they may not participate in the discussion because the class may have moved on to the next point of the discussion. ELL graduate students are very hesitant to request assistance or further explanation of a topic not understood. In my experience, many ELL students will wait until after the class has ended to ask for clarification. It may take some time before instructors become aware of any gaps in learning or comprehension because of this hesitancy to approach instructors for help.

Furthermore, the limited speech discourse provided by the international graduate students in discussions could be explained by their previous learning environment. Professor Buffay suggested, “…they need to understand, appreciate the learner-centred approach, why it is good, why it is better than the lecture-based just sitting there listening passively to the instructors.” Speech discourse within the classroom setting could be restricted to answering questions posed only for answering specific knowledge-based questions rather than a reciprocal exchange of ideas. Therefore, international graduate students’ previous educational experience may influence their interpretation of a class discussion, thus limiting their use of speech discourse. The ‘banking model’ of education where the teacher is responsible for depositing knowledge without questioning from students (Freire, 1970) is the typical model of education for many of the ELL graduate students who come from East Asian countries. With limited knowledge of and experience in a learner-centred environment, international graduate students may find themselves unwilling to participate in an unfamiliar setting. International graduate students need to be made aware of the social constructivism approach to teaching and learning in the Canadian school system. Higher-order cognitive functioning develops with social interaction rather than in isolation (Vygotsky, 1986). Education in Canada involves social and collaborative tasks to establish an environment for opportunities to engage with higher forms of cognition. ELL graduate students need to have exposure and understanding of these different approaches to learning and teaching to be prepared for their program of study in the Faculty of Education at a master’s level.

In summary, international graduate students need to develop their vocabulary, grammar and comprehension in reading, writing, listening, and speaking to further their
skill development in English and be successful in engaging in their graduate courses in the Faculty of Education. Without the foundation of discourse, students may not develop their English language skills at the genre level. ELL graduate students who do not build enough discourse knowledge prior to participation in their education courses will face challenges with understanding the academic genres in required readings and in producing written assignments. Graduate course instructors will then be burdened with the task of not only teaching educational content but also teaching discourse and genre knowledge to their ELL graduate students. If this is the circumstance, it may alienate the domestic or fluent English-speaking students in the class.

Genre Knowledge:

Genre builds on discourse by organizing ideas into a particular text based on the audience. Swales (1990) identifies genres as a characteristic of a discourse community that assists in communicating its goals. “Genre is quite easily used to refer to a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations.” (Swales, 1990, p. 33) Genre guides the purpose of a text based on the cultural patterns established by language (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). International graduate students need to understand how genre is used in English-speaking academic environments. According to Swales (1990), genre involves the organization of texts with similar patterns including “structure, style, content and intended audience” (p. 58). The interviews with the instructors of the Faculty of Education for this research provided two themes within the area of genre knowledge for reading and writing: types of composition and referencing style. Listening and speaking skills, however, were related to genres around student-centered learning: discussions, pair work and breakout groups.

Reading:

To begin, reading at an academic level for international graduate students requires understanding of genre to enable their membership within the academic community. Academic texts read at a graduate level typically follow patterns of composition that assist in developing their production of written work. International graduate students need to be able to understand the genre of texts they read for comprehension purposes. The
genres that international graduate students require exposure to are expository, summary, literature review, and/or standard academic writing. Professor Green explained,

…the lack of foundation in academic text is difficult because they’re not used to either the outline or form that is being presented to them. So, for example, we are --- most of our English first language students would be used to an essay or expository form which begins with an introduction. There is an argument taking place. There’s …a set of data or information that is being analyzed and criticized. Professor Buffay added to this idea with,

…I also have them to choose an article, particularly a journal article, to do an article critique. By doing that, they would understand, first of all, what kind of article can be publishable. As great students, they would learn to understand those standard academic writing and also to see how to develop it.

Exposing international graduate students to academic texts prior to graduate studies will better prepare them for the demands of their coursework in the Faculty of Education. This will also expose students to formatting conventions of academic texts.

Formatting of academic texts is the second theme identified in reading. The typical format of educational research is the American Psychological Association or APA-style. In referring to reading, Professor Green stated, “…citing of the origin of an idea are all variants we take for granted, but people that [are] from a different perspective or from a different community perspective would have difficulty with as they go through.” The elements of formatting a text are another aspect of genre that international graduate students must become aware of for further developing their reading skills. Many ELL graduate students are unaware of the academic expectations related to formatting of documents for submission to their professors. The EAP program in which I am employed introduces and practices formatting expectations with students, but not all ELL graduate students enter their graduate programs through the EAP program. Many students enter their graduate studies with an IELTS score. The IELTS academic stream test no longer assesses APA formatting or any other format in the assessment because it requires more
time for assessors to grade the test by checking for plagiarism. Without exposure to formatting of documents, ELL graduate students who are not attending EAP programs prior to their studies do not have the awareness or knowledge of plagiarism and methods to avoid it. Writing in an APA format becomes another element that Faculty of Education professors need to take the time to address with ELL graduate students as opposed to those students who have completed an undergraduate degree in an English-speaking institution.

*Writing:* Moreover, international graduate students do not only use reading to gain genre knowledge but also to guide their production of written work as a member of the academic community. As discussed by Professor Buffay,

…by summarizing a published article, then they learn how to do academic writing because your summary is not a cut and paste, you have to paraphrase. And by doing that you learn how to use academic language to write your English. …they would learn intuitively and also explicitly how to do academic writing.

International graduate students’ exposure to academic texts can then prepare them for the expectations of written work within the Faculty of Education.

Additionally, understanding research questions from reading can better prepare international graduate students for creating their own research questions for research proposals in graduate studies. In the production of written work, Professor Green explained, “…at the master’s level, I really focus on question[s], so thinking about how a single question leads you down a particular path, but most of the types of writing of course are expository, traditional scientific expository writing.” Similarly, Professor Bing described, “And then there is an assignment for students to write --- to make a literature review. And then they are asked to write a research proposal.” Academic genre knowledge provides international graduate students with the expectations of academic research publications. ELL graduate students are unable to gain knowledge of academic genres without being introduced to them prior to their entry into their programs. The EAP program in which I teach introduces the organization of academic journal articles and practice in reading through the information to comprehend the important elements. As
mentioned in the previous section, not all ELL graduate students entering the Faculty of Education at the institution in this study attend the EAP program, so they may not be familiar with research publications. With exposure to journal articles in the EAP program, ELL graduate students have exposure to models of academic writing to then guide their own written work. ELL graduate students typically do not have awareness of the elements such as a literature review in academic research papers. Once again, this is added to the instructional demands of professors to inform the ELL graduate students of what these elements in academic writing at a graduate level are during the course at the expense of those within the class who have prior knowledge of academic writing in English.

Other genres discussed by the participants included annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, term papers (expository), and reflections. Each of them includes, as Swales describes, “structure, style, content and intended audience” (p. 58), and students need practice with these genres prior to their graduate studies at the Faculty of Education. International graduate students are at a disadvantage compared to domestic students as they do not necessarily have any previous exposure to genres used in North American institutions. For example, Professor Green said, “[Expository writing] is a very simple form that students, with North American students or Western students, in particular, have for most of their academic years that international students do not.” Professor Buffay also commented, “…high school kids here in Canada that they start learning how to do academic writing about plagiarism, about proper references, citations and all that. So, they’ve been training since high school.” These types of compositions that graduate students are expected to write must be introduced to international graduate students in order for them to be successful in completing written assignments in the Faculty of Education. As Professor Buffay indicated many of the international graduate students may not have had the same exposure and explanation as to what constitutes plagiarism which relates to APA formatting as another theme identified in this study. This returns to the point made earlier in the Reading section of Genre knowledge that students who do not attend the EAP program prior to entry into the Faculty of Education graduate program will have limited to no knowledge of academic integrity and plagiarism and how to avoid it through effective paraphrasing, summarizing and citation methods. Professors in the
Faculty of Education are then tasked with informing and instructing students on what is required as a student in academia at an English-speaking institution.

Another genre in academic writing is APA formatting which many of the participants found as an aspect of writing that international graduate students do not have enough experience. “It looks that APA is really something challenging for the students,” explained Professor Bing. Professor Bing elaborated,

And for some students, even if they are at the stage of writing their thesis, they still do not use the right format such as left alignment and page number so on and so forth, and a lot of students don’t know the difference between a bibliography and reference.

Similarly, Professor Buffay said,

…and then you need to make proper references to anything, even if you just heard it from somebody, [it] is not from yourself. You have to make a reference even if it’s a personal communication, or if it’s from reading, definitely you need to learn how to make proper citations, in the references and all that.

Professor Tribbiani also concurred by saying, “…they should know APA, but everybody should. And I have to say that this particular response is not restricted to international students. I have found that there is a generally low level of knowledge of using conventions of APA.” Academic genres include the formatting of written publications according to the field of study in which students need familiarity prior to entering their studies. APA would be considered a genre based on the definition by Swales (1990), “structure, style, content and intended audience” (p. 58). Therefore, international graduate students require experience with formatting expectations within their field of research, and in this case, they need to become familiar with APA formatting in the Faculty of Education. Several types of composition and APA formatting are genres in which international graduate students need experience within English reading and writing. However, the listening and speaking genres that international graduate students in the Faculty of Education are surrounded by constitute learner-centred education. The EAP program at the institution in this study provides exposure to various genres in reading and writing in addition to exposure and practice with APA
formatting. This program also provides learner-centred education with ELLs practicing their English and academic skills rather than being lectured to in English. ELL graduate students who do not have any experience with engaging in a learner-centred classroom are unaware of the expectations of such a classroom environment. It not only becomes a struggle for the ELL graduate students to participate in class, but it also becomes a challenge for professors to get them to engage in class activities, so the students can truly attain what their graduate studies have to offer them in their learning.

*Listening & Speaking:*

The interview participants identified discussions, pair work and breakout groups as genres that international graduate students find difficult when listening and speaking in English. As indicated by Professor Buffay,

> …the cultural differences in terms of the teaching approach because they are used to coming to class, listen to the lectures, take notes, and then memorize and then take the exam. So, when we started this participatory approach, like students, have to take the initiative to be responsible for their own learning, and there is a lot of learning by themselves or among the class.

Professor Green indicated similar ideas regarding listening and speaking among international graduate students. “[Listening and speaking] is definitely not easy if your role for the last 21 years, has been simply to listen and repeat.” With the approach of education being learner-centred, international graduate students require orientation into different listening and speaking skills to effectively participate. ELL graduate students are required to listen to the information being presented and understand it, sometimes through translation, and then they need to reflect on the information to formulate a response to engage in a discussion. This requires a higher cognitive load than memorizing information presented in traditional teacher-centered classrooms. ELL graduate students need to have exposure and practice in learner-centred classrooms in English to prepare for the cognitive demands that will be placed on them in their graduate courses.

Participation in discussions requires both receptive and productive use of English to engage in this genre. Professor Geller provided an example of leading a class discussion.
I want you to think of one specific idea from this article that you’re left with that you think is worth sharing with the class. So, I just wait for maybe a minute, and then I call on somebody…And then I may have a follow-up question. And then if I ask [an international student] I may have to reinterpret…

Professor Green indicated, “I would love to see more interactive conversations…, but I suppose one of the biggest building blocks needed is with listening.” Class discussions are an element of graduate courses that assist in the development of learning and comprehension of various topics within the Faculty of Education. International graduate students need to have developed the foundational skills of listening and speaking to engage in discussions effectively. ELL graduate students need practice participating in discussions to learn and practice turn-taking strategies to effectively contribute their ideas on the topic being discussed. ELLs need to learn the social cues involved in discussions as they play an important role in addition to the verbal cues. Without previous exposure and practice in turn-taking, ELL graduate students may not feel comfortable engaging in class discussions, and therefore, they will not gain the full learning experience of their graduate degree. Moreover, professors instructing ELL graduate students in their courses may not be able to assess how much these students are comprehending if they are not participating in classroom discussions. If international graduate students are not participating in discussions, then again, they may not be asking questions for clarification of any information presented in class. This further compounds the experiences for both the students’ learning and the instructors’ teaching in coursework.

In addition to class discussion, presentations in the form of leading a class discussion are expected in many of the courses in the Faculty of Education. For example, Professor Buffay explained, “…I get them to do the pair presentation around one of the important pieces of reading to lead the discussion in class.” Therefore, the expectation is not only to participate in discussions but to also lead the class in discussion, which can provide even greater challenges for international graduate students who have limited experience in engaging in activities such as these because of their limited experience with presenting and leading a discussion in English. Some international graduate students who
are enrolled in graduate studies have never given a presentation not to mention a presentation in English. This is often very intimidating for ELLs. Presentations require much preparation and practice that ELL graduate students may not be aware of. Therefore, they require opportunities to prepare and practice prior to their graduate studies. In addition to presenting, ELL graduate students are expected to engage with their classmates during their presentations to create a learner-centred environment through discussion. This creates another layer of challenge for ELLs in their graduate coursework, especially for those without previous teaching experience which many ELL graduate students in the Faculty of Education do not have prior to entering their graduate studies. Without experience presenting or leading a discussion, ELL graduate students often read from a script to present because they lack the confidence in presenting by talking about key concepts and ideas in a natural way. Their way of leading a discussion within their presentation is by posing questions to the class without effectively responding to what was said by their classmates. They often agree with the point made without really reflecting on the ideas mentioned because they are simply trying to complete the expected task.

Moreover, within the class, there are individual discussion groups that take place within courses. “…I give a bit of instruction to the individual groups, and I say I want you to choose a chair. And I want the chair to be responsible for encouraging everybody in the group to participate…” described Professor Geller. Again, if international students have limited experience with participating or even leading a discussion, it may be challenging for them to participate in the given task of the course. As a result, international graduate students need to be familiar with the genres of discussions, pair work and breakout groups while using English. ELL graduate students will only gain such experience when they attend an EAP program prior to enrolling in their graduate course work like the one in which I teach at the location of this study. As stated previously, ELL graduate students who enroll with an IELTS score for entry into the Faculty of Education may not have experience with these genres used in a learner-centred classroom which is disadvantageous to their full participation in their learning.

Therefore, international graduate students need familiarity with various genres used within the academic community in the Faculty of Education to successfully
participate in their studies. Familiarity is needed in reading academic genres to model the expectation of their own production of written work. International graduate students also need additional practice in student-centred learning environments to participate in a variety of speaking genres to prepare for the academic environment in which they are going to enroll. Knowledge of genres provides an equitable opportunity to fully engage with the learning environment and their domestic counterparts.

**Background/ Cultural Knowledge:**

Background or cultural knowledge includes sociocultural and educational information within the Canadian context. International graduate students are most likely to have limited or no background knowledge of the sociocultural context of Canada, and therefore, it can be challenging for them to apply various culturally specific social, political and historical aspects of the educational framework of Ontario in their learning. The social, political, and historical aspects within the Canadian context all have influence and implications for the educational system that exists today in Ontario. With that being said, many policies, curricula, issues and experiences presented by professors are within the Canadian or Ontario school context. Without this background knowledge, international graduate students are disadvantaged in actively participating within their courses in the Faculty of Education.

In addition, classroom culture within the Canadian context is likely to be more learner-centred than teacher-centred. This method of teaching and learning may be unfamiliar for international graduate students, particularly those from East Asian cultures, and so engaging them in the practice can be challenging as many countries are still using the *banking model* of education as coined by Paulo Freire. International graduate students may find it difficult to participate in the classroom in this manner if they are unfamiliar with the social customs within the learner-centred environment. This may further impede their learning experience in graduate studies in the Faculty of Education as the courses were never designed with international students in mind. Oftentimes, these students are learning about certain aspects of the Canadian education system for the first time and much of that foundational knowledge is already assumed to be common knowledge in the teaching and learning materials of the graduate course. Therefore, lack of experience in
and/or knowledge of the history and background context of the education system in Canada and lack of specific cultural knowledge of Canada and Canadian society are barriers that hinder the learning of our international graduate students in education.

Two sub-themes identified in the participant interviews within reading and listening, also known as receptive skills, are foundational text familiarity and discovered sociocultural issues within the Canadian context and in its education system. In addition, the theme that emerged in writing and speaking, or production skills, is the resistance to challenging and questioning authority. The final theme identified in background/cultural knowledge is participants’ struggle with the expectations of the learner-centred classroom, which requires both receptive and productive skills of listening and speaking.

*Receptive skills:*

Lack of familiarity with foundational texts and sociocultural issues within the Canadian educational system limits the comprehension of international graduate students. For example, international graduate students in the Faculty of Education may have limited knowledge of the foundational texts within the area of study. Professor Green explained,

…a lot of critical thinking happens with the foundation of seminal texts for a particular culture…If you don’t know some of those simple analogies, then you’re going to — it’ll be difficult to criticize, critically analyze and think about what you’re reading because you don’t have that same framework of reference that other readers might from that culture.

Professor Bing also reported, “…non-native speakers who study English as their major, so they learned about a lot of — the language itself, but they do not really know much content or discipline knowledge.” This indicates that international graduate students entering the Faculty of Education are trying to catch up to their domestic counterparts not only in language development but also in foundational texts within educational research. Limited foundational text familiarity can become further compounded by the sociocultural issues raised within the Canadian context. If students are not familiar with educational theorists, such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Benjamin Bloom to name only a few, they may find that they do not know some of the references being made during their class discussions which hinder their ability to
contribute. Then adding to the complexity of the subject matter, international graduate students may not be aware of the sociocultural issues present in education in the Canadian context which further impedes their listening comprehension of the subject matter. As a result, international graduate students are restricted as to what they are able to contribute in productive skills in a learner-centred classroom without the background/cultural knowledge prior to their course.

Much more of the research in Canadian education involves investigating sociocultural issues that may not be explored in other countries like China for example. A significant number of the international graduate students are from China and those discrepancies can become obvious to instructors. International graduate students, therefore, may not have familiarity with the issues explored in the texts they read within the Faculty of Education. Professor Buffay described,

And also, in terms of struggle when they read academic articles, particularly when there are many jargons like theories, many of – some of them would be struggling with that, and also because we are in education, so if they are not familiar with these sociocultural contexts of Canada, and then they would not quite understand what’s being discussed. Unlike say, Canadian students, they would know right away what this article is about because they understand, let’s say, antiracism, or multiculturalism, cultural identity issues, immigration issues, and all kinds of sociocultural issues we discuss in education, so those would sound very foreign to [some] students.

The concepts that are raised for discussion may be new and unfamiliar to some international graduate students and restrict them from engaging in their program of study. I argue here that there is a cultural mismatch between international graduate students’ knowledge, experience and cultural background and their courses that goes beyond their mastery of the English language. Most of these international graduate students are at a disadvantage compared to the local Canadian students in the same class.

*Productive skills:*

In addition to limited exposure to sociocultural issues in Canadian contexts, one sociocultural aspect that international graduate students had difficulties with is
disagreeing with authority figures and being explicit in their opinions. When engaging in discussions or writing at an academic level, it is more likely for Canadian students to question, think critically, or critique what they are learning in their courses or even offer their own perspectives. On the other hand, some international graduate students had difficulties in both writing and speaking when they were expected to critique the learning materials as they see course readings and university lectures as being offered by “experts,” and they believe that it can be considered inappropriate to question teacher’s learning. Professor Green said, “They should know how to question, so to feel comfortable criticizing authority, which as you know as Canadians, we have no problem with whatsoever.” Professor Bing explained, “You shouldn’t just accept whatever other people say, no matter how famous they are…they should be encouraged to express whatever they think, and they shouldn’t worry about upsetting authority or something like that.” Also, Professor Tribbiani identified, “I believe international students have this sense that if you read anything in print from somebody who is a university employee, researcher, you just believe it…” Professor Tribbiani added, “…they would hardly ever want to challenge me, so there is a respectful and disrespectful way to challenge an instructor or professor in the classroom. But they would find it very difficult to say, “Well Professor Tribbiani, you said the following, but in such and such an article it seemed that researcher reached a different conclusion.”

From these descriptions, we can conclude that there is a gap in what is considered culturally appropriate for some of the international graduate students within a Canadian context. The expectations of the professors in the Faculty of Education may not align with the sociocultural behaviours that international graduate students have been raised within their home countries. International graduate students may have difficulty in questioning or challenging ideas presented in courses hindering their engagement in their writing and discussions during their course work. The limitations of not being comfortable challenging authority and ideas also contribute to the lack of engagement by some international graduate students in the learner-centred classroom.

*Listening & Speaking:*

In the Faculty of Education, classrooms are learner-centred which some international graduate students may find intimidating because the expectation is for the
students and their perspectives to be a part of the lesson. The difference between home culture and Canadian culture of the learning environments is another factor to be considered regarding international graduate students’ reluctance to engage in discussions in class. As Professor Buffay described,

…if you just sit there, listen to me lecturing, you don’t learn much, so I think that again attributed to the fact they are used to sitting there learning passively since they were young…they need to understand the learner-centred approach, why it is good, why it is better than the lecture-based just sitting there listening passively to the instructors.

Many international graduate students who have no experience with this type of learner-centred learning environment may find it challenging to engage in their second and/or other language when they are not even used to this style of teaching and learning in their first language. As a result, international graduate students may not have the most effective learning experience possible in the Faculty of Education due to their cultural mismatch.

In summary, background and cultural knowledge are required for international graduate students at the Faculty of Education to effectively engage in the classroom. Familiarity with foundational texts in educational theory and research is needed for international graduate students to be successful in their graduate studies. Awareness of sociocultural issues in the Canadian context is also needed for students to gain a better comprehension of topics raised in readings and discussions. International graduate students need experience in challenging authority and experts in a respectful manner to effectively engage in writing and speaking in their coursework. Finally, international graduate students need to understand the differences between the traditional banking model of education and learner-centred teaching to appreciate their learning experience in the Faculty of Education at an Ontario university.

Critical thinking:

Critical thinking skills are essential in academic studies and are valued as a key learning tool particularly in graduate studies in Canada. Although the nature and
definition of critical thinking skills may vary, it can generally be considered as having the ability to accomplish higher-order cognitive tasks of evaluating, assessing, challenging, rethinking, taking multiple viewpoints, offering new perspectives and formulating new or novel ideas. In order for international graduate students to engage in this way of thinking, they require the language and opportunity to develop, express and display their critical thinking in their course work. Critical thinking can often be confused with being critical as indicated by some of the interview participants. For example, Professor Buffay indicated,

...I asked them to do an article critique. They right away jump to the limitations of this article..., so I think they misunderstood the article critique is for you to really understand what critical thinking to appreciate: what can you learn from this article?

In addition, Professor Bing explained, “[a student] thought she was critiquing, but she was actually criticizing a published article.” The learning strategies that are valued in the Canadian context may not be valued in other educational systems. As a result, some international graduate students may not be familiar with how to effectively engage in critical thinking. Even if they are familiar, they may lack the vocabulary to effectively express their critical thinking in the written and spoken work. The specific themes identified by the interview participants in the area of critical thinking are posing questions, a deeper level of comprehension, and making connections. I will explore those in more detail in the next section.

**Productive skills:**

International graduate students tend to form questions regarding research that are direct or factual rather than indirect or evaluative questions in both their written work and discussions. Professor Geller described a typical discussion of a research article survey and the use of a questionnaire. Professor Geller commented,

My thought in terms of procedure and design is that was there follow-up? What was the nature of the follow-up? And what were the statistical results as with respect to the follow-up? Did it generate more responses and possibly was there a comparison between the first bank of responses and the second bank? Okay, so from that perspective, they’re
not just saying, there was follow-up, period, stop, blank, nothing happens, but what was the nature of the follow-up? In other words, they are asking questions between the lines, and they’re asking questions about stated facts.

Of concern here for faculty instructors is that international graduate students are not making any inferences about the context of the text being read. Professor Geller continued, “Look past the facts of the article, and I like it if they can ask questions like posing a question…if you pose the question, then it shows you’re thinking.” The faculty instructors in this study felt that international graduate students experience difficulty also in engaging more critically with what they read and formulating questions about the text because of the lack of knowledge of the education system. As a way of assisting international graduate students to engage more critically with what they read, they need guidance in formulating questions that look beyond stated facts in the texts that they read.

In addition to formulating questions about articles being read, posing research questions for their writing can be challenging for international graduate students. Professor Green stated,

So, their assignments which are usually four or five [assignments] take place in the form of generating questions, providing feedback on other people’s questions, recognizing how those questions could lead you to a particular data set or methodology, and then literature review…

Understanding what makes an effective research question for international students’ research requires a deeper comprehension of the materials assigned for reading. Without the background context and prior culturally specific knowledge of the education system, international graduate students often miss key details that are assumed as taken-for-granted prior knowledge necessary to understand the course content and to be able to ask meaningful questions in class. Without that understanding of the Ontario or Canadian education system, they fall behind in class and are also hesitant to ask for clarification.

Receptive skills:

Based on the participant interviews reading comprehension varied among international graduate students. Some international graduate students require a deeper understanding of the text to engage with the content in their written and spoken
production of work. Professor Green explained, “...a lot of critical thinking happens with the foundation of seminal texts for a particular culture...to be able to critically look at something you need that foundation of reading.” As mentioned in the previous section, background and cultural knowledge are needed to develop a deeper understanding of the topics in the Faculty of Education. I argue here that for critical thinking to be demonstrated in writing and speaking for international graduate students, a foundation of educational theory and research is needed for their success within their program.

Moreover, critical thinking not only requires the foundation of content knowledge, but it also requires the language to convey ideas. According to Professor Buffay,

Definitely, there is a lot of room to be improved for critical thinking. I think again connects to the language barriers because the --- if they are struggling to digest what is read and then move to another level for critical thinking, definitely needs another level to do that.

Professor Bing also expressed a similar thought on language being a barrier to expressing critical thinking. “So, if they’re still struggling with the grammar or vocabulary, then you cannot really have much expectation of their critical thinking skills...because even if they have some thoughts, they cannot really express them clearly...,” explained Professor Bing. International graduate students need exposure and experience with academic and specialized vocabulary to effectively interpret what they read and demonstrate their critical thinking skills in their writing and discussions. I argue that international graduate students need to have comprehension of academic vocabulary as well as specialized vocabulary within their field of study prior to their graduate course to be successful in engaging in critical thinking in both writing and speaking. Without the necessary vocabulary, international graduate students struggle to understand the content of texts, and therefore are unable to communicate their thoughts and opinions effectively in written or spoken format, which hinders their educational experience.

Furthermore, educational background, which was discussed in the previous section, can also restrict critical thinking from occurring in the classroom. Professor Tribbiani stated about paper and pencil tests in East Asian cultures,
They had to recite them and to give evidence of where these conclusions came from, but not strong in being able to reflect, to challenge conclusions or to add to or propose different solutions or different ways to solve a problem.

As a result, some international graduate students do not have the experience to critically read and interpret information based on their educational background, which further hinders their ability to express critical thinking in an English language classroom.

However, critical thinking can be developed with time in their coursework. Some strategies are implemented by instructors for the development of critical thinking for international graduate students in the Faculty of Education. For example, Professor Buffay explained, “...then in class, we would discuss that reading and relate to the practice, either the teaching or learning practice or the lived experience. So, then they would gain a deep understanding.” International graduate students need the strategies to develop the practice of critically thinking in reading and writing, so they understand the expectations of their professors. Without the practice to develop critical thinking strategies, international graduate students are delayed in comparison to their domestic counterparts in being able to meet the standard expected of professors for critical thinking about the topics brought forward in class. I argue that if students do not have critical thinking strategies prior to entry into their graduate course, they are unable to fully experience what a graduate education has to offer. If these strategies are developing while they are attending their courses, then they are delayed in participating and demonstrating their critical thinking which limits their educational experience in comparison to their Canadian peers.

Additionally, to gain a deeper understanding of texts, international graduate students need to be able to make connections between texts and their own experiences with teaching and learning. When they can make connections with texts, their critical thinking also improves. Professor Geller noted in reference to reading, “What I’d like ideally for them to be able to read a document and at the starting point to comprehend the factual information within the document. What was said, and to make connections within points within the document.” Professor Buffay also said, “…I want them to be able to make connections between different readings, which I have found students have some
struggles. I think partly because the language, partly because of the way they were taught...” Both Professor Geller and Professor Buffay expressed that some international graduate students do not recognize the importance of making connections within and between the texts they read for their coursework. This further inhibits their critical thinking in their reading and writing.

Moreover, international graduate students need to recognize the connection to their own lived experiences as knowledge that can contribute to their reading and writing. For instance, Professor Tribbiani indicated,

...even at a graduate level of taking information and applying it to their own circumstances of turning it into knowledge that works for them by critically reflecting on that material.... To be able to critically reflect and demonstrate their clear understanding of the material and how it should be used.

Some international graduate students have difficulty in taking the knowledge that they have gained through text and experience and applying it in new circumstances or situations to promote and demonstrate their critical thinking.

Therefore, critical thinking is essential for international graduate students’ success in the Faculty of Education. For critical thinking to be demonstrated in the classroom, international graduate students need to pose questions beyond the facts presented in texts. They also need to be able to pose effective questions for their research. By gaining a deeper comprehension of the texts they read, international graduate students will be able to demonstrate their critical analysis in their discussions and writing. Making connections within and between texts will promote their critical thinking. International graduate students can build on those connections by reflecting on their own teaching and learning experiences to effectively demonstrate their critical thinking to instructors.

In summary, the findings of this research have identified four major themes: discourse communities, genre knowledge, background/cultural knowledge and critical thinking. International graduate students require vocabulary and comprehension of the discourse community they will be engaging with at the Faculty of Education. Knowledge of the discourse needed to be included in the academic community will enhance their genre knowledge. International graduate students need to have experience with the types
of composition used in academia in both written and spoken production. They also need familiarity with formatting and referencing as a part of genre knowledge. Additionally, international graduate students require background/cultural knowledge of the Canadian education system, specifically in Ontario. Understanding sociocultural issues that arise in the Canadian context of learning and teaching is also needed for international graduate students to be successful in their studies. Finally, critical thinking strategies are needed for posing questions, having deeper comprehension, and making connections.

Discussion:

Two significant connections -- critical thinking, and disciplinary conventions were made to the literature reviewed for this case study. I will discuss them in order of least to most significant. First, in critical thinking, international graduate students require the skills to transform what they have learned, and for this to occur, they will require modeling of critical thinking. Also, the ability to make connections was observed to be lacking by international graduate students when demonstrating their critical thinking skills. The most significant disciplinary conventions, based on the interviews with participants, were identified as an essential area in which international graduate students require further knowledge. Within disciplinary conventions, one area of significance that international graduate students require is discourse knowledge, specifically vocabulary. The most noteworthy observations made by the participants identify genre knowledge as an area of exposure prior to international graduate students’ entry into the Faculty of Education. With exposure to genre, international graduate students also need to appreciate research problems and how they are developed.

Critical thinking:

Participants in this case study identified three areas of critical thinking that were also conveyed by previous research as identified in the literature review. The ability to transform knowledge to contribute to the field of study, modelling of texts within the area of study, and the ability to make connections with previous knowledge with new content are all areas that appeared in observations by the professors who participated in this case study.
Bereiter and Scardamalia (1997), Cumming (1995), Spack (1997), and Spivey (1990) identified that academic writing necessitates the ability to use learned knowledge to create new ideas. Professor Geller also conveyed this idea that many international graduate students in courses are “asking questions about stated fact.” This is in line with Bereiter and Scadamalia’s (1997) research that traditional school practices require “knowledge telling.” International graduate students who are experienced in this passive form of learning find it challenging to implement more mental effort through “knowledge transformation.” Professor Tribbiani explained that international graduate students are “not strong in being able to reflect, to challenge conclusions or to add to or propose different solutions or different ways to solve problems.” International graduate students require experience and exposure to such practices especially if they are coming from countries which use the “banking model” of education. International graduate students need to learn how to move beyond reciting memorized information to produce new thoughts and ideas in English. Opportunities to practice critical thinking are needed prior to their entry into their graduate studies because it takes time to develop these skills effectively. To help to develop this skill, modelling of such language is beneficial.

Prior (1991) recommends modelling through classroom discussions of written work, such as research proposals and article critiques, to assist students in developing their written assignments. By modelling the expectations of critical thinking through discussions and texts, international graduate students can develop the discourse as well as expectations of what is being asked of them by their course instructors. For example, Professor Bing explained in the interview that a student misunderstood what an article critique was. “…she was actually criticizing a published article,” said Professor Bing. This is a clear example of how a student took the literal translation of the word rather than modelling it after an example. Requiring students to take on assignments without any familiarity with what they are expected to produce limits their opportunity to successfully complete the task. Professor Green explained graduate students in courses are expected to generate questions, provide feedback on questions, recognize how questions lead to a method, and then to reviewing the literature. Professor Green is in the process of modelling a research proposal to assist graduate students in developing the needed critical thinking strategies to develop their writing.
In addition to modelling, international graduate students also need to make connections to demonstrate critical thinking. ELL graduate students who come from countries that use the traditional ‘banking model’ of education use the information learned in their courses to pass a test and move on to other subject matter without applying the information learned to real-world circumstances. Both Professors Geller and Buffay expressed this in their interviews in reference to making connections within the reading and between readings. Professor Tribbiani concurred by saying, “…taking information and applying it to their own circumstances of turning it into knowledge that works for them…” These concepts are not addressed when using the ‘banking model’ of education by only depositing information into the learner. Students who come from this type of learning system do not have the awareness or experience of what to do with this learned information other than being tested on it.

Moreover, ELL graduate students often are unable to make connections to their own experiences with what they are reading and apply the information critically. As Professor Tribbiani mentioned in the interview. “…at a graduate level of taking information and applying it to their own circumstances of turning it into knowledge that works for them by critically reflecting on that material…” The lack or limited experience with critical reflection for ELL graduate students may be due to the traditional “banking model” of education from their home countries. As Freire (1970) argues, liberating education requires participants to engage in action and reflection for transformation to occur. Without ELL graduate students’ reflective practices on their learning, they are limiting their opportunity to transform not only their learning experience but also the knowledge they have gained during their graduate courses. Therefore, they are not able to take complete advantage of the opportunities provided with a graduate-level education.

To sum up, critical thinking is an area that ELL graduate students seem to be lacking based on the interview participants. ELL graduate students in the Faculty of Education require more preparation and practice to transform what they have learned rather than be tested on it. They need exposure to models of the tasks required in both writing and speaking to be fully prepared for their courses. Finally, for their critical thinking, ELL graduate students require practice to make connections within and between readings as well as making connections to their own lived experiences.
Disciplinary conventions:

Disciplinary conventions that the case study participants identified as challenging for ELL graduate students were discourse knowledge, vocabulary, and genre. Discourse knowledge is understanding how language is socially constructed for a particular audience with a particular purpose, and many ELL graduate students struggle with academic discourse. As identified by Biggs et al. (1999), cognitive demand increases for ELLs because they lack familiarity with writing conventions. This was identified by Professor Green. “…students from other countries perhaps the languages are a bit more poetic or narrative that’s a struggle for them because they have to focus on facts…keeping the central question and that benign answer in mind,” Professor Green explained in reference to graduate writing. This is a clear example of the conventions of academic discourse not being present in ELL graduate students’ language learning experience. Another example provided by Professor Buffay in ELL graduate students' failure to meet academic requirements in written discourse is when they are using spoken contractions (as noted in the Findings) in their written work. Due to the limited awareness of some ELL graduate students, exposure to academic texts specifically in the Faculty of Education may be needed prior to entry into course work to ensure successful participation in graduate studies and to understand how discourse is constructed in an academic environment.

In addition, within disciplinary conventions, the case study participants identified vocabulary as a challenge for ELL graduate students. This was surprising as in the literature review there was little mentioned in disciplinary conventions regarding vocabulary. Academic vocabulary comprehension and use were difficult for ELL graduate students in their Faculty of Education courses. ELL graduate students need familiarity with the academic word list prior to the start of courses in the Faculty of Education as identified by the interview participants. Professor Green commented, “…common things that you would expect in any language learner’s academic vocabulary are absent.” Professor Bing and Geller both identified vocabulary as challenging for ELL graduate students. Professor Bing found vocabulary often caused misunderstandings of information presented in texts while Professor Geller identified students as having a heavy reliance on dictionary use when reading texts. If ELL graduate students have
limited exposure to academic vocabulary and educational terminology prior to their entry into their graduate course work, it will not only limit their comprehension of the course material, but it will also limit their participation in any course tasks. This will hinder their learning experience as well as impact the classroom dynamics with the instructor and domestic students. ELL graduate students who do not have a foundation of academic language at a minimum will find it challenging to adapt to the learning environment preventing them from taking advantage of all that their graduate program has to offer in their learning and career opportunities.

Furthermore, the most significant finding of this case study as it relates to discourse conventions is genre knowledge. ELL graduate students are not familiar with the variety of genres used in English academic writing to organize ideas. They have limited or no awareness of formatting and referencing conventions, particularly American Psychological Association (APA) citation methods. ELL graduate students also find it challenging to develop a research problem.

Many ELLs understand the standard essay format, which includes an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion. However, in my view, they have limited awareness of the purpose and audience for writing. As Professor Green acknowledged in the interview, “There is an argument taking place. There’s …a set of data or information that is being analyzed and criticized.” Understanding the purpose of their writing and what they need to do in support of an argument is often lacking, based on my experience with ELLs. If they do not have previous exposure to and practice with the genres of academic writing, ELL graduate students will find it a challenge to effectively produce a written assignment in the Faculty of Education graduate courses. ELL graduate students need to be aware of expository writing, summaries/abstracts, literature reviews and research proposals prior to enrolling in their graduate courses. Professor Buffay requires graduate students to critique a journal article, so they can see what is considered a standard publishable journal article as a model. However, in Professor Bing’s example of an ELL graduate student critiquing a journal article, the exercise did not have the expected outcome. The student misunderstood what it meant and interpreted the word literally as being critical of the journal article. This is not only a comprehension problem, but it may be connected to the limitations of ELL graduate students’ limited skill development in making
connections and understanding that what they read can be used as a model for their own written work. Genre awareness in written work is not the only area in which ELL graduate students have limited experience. They also have limited exposure to spoken genres within academic studies.

Genre is often identified as a way of writing, but it is also a part of spoken discourse. Many ELL graduate students who come from a traditional ‘banking model’ school system find it challenging to engage in and lead discussions which are a core component of the Faculty of Education graduate courses. Professor Green commented that listening and speaking are not easy for ELLs after years of being trained to memorize and repeat. Spoken academic genres for ELL graduate students can be challenging because of their limited experience with group discussions and pair work as they may have no experience in their first language to transfer skills into English. Therefore, ELL graduate students need to be made aware of and have practice with different spoken genres in graduate studies in the Faculty of Education.

In addition to genre knowledge, ELL graduate students require knowledge and practice with APA formatting and referencing prior to their graduate coursework. APA formatting and referencing conventions are the expected method for publishing in the field of Education. Many ELL graduate students are unaware of the formatting standards and practices when writing even when their level of English is high as conveyed by Professor Bing. “And for some students even if they are at the stage of writing their thesis, they still do not use the right format…” explained Professor Bing. This does not just apply to ELLs, according to Dr. Tribbiani. More training on APA formatting is needed at a graduate level. What ELL graduate students tend to be challenged with is understanding that if they are referring to others’ ideas or work, they need to include a proper citation. All graduate students need exposure and practice with APA formatting and referencing; however, ELL graduate students need extra practice with effectively paraphrasing and summarizing with the proper citation of the source information to avoid plagiarism. Providing ELL graduate students with APA formatting and referencing practice prior to enrolment in their graduate courses will benefit not only the ELL graduate students, but it will also allow for more instructional time on the course content.
A part of the content in the graduate courses with the Faculty of Education is identifying an area of research to produce a research proposal.

Research proposals require graduate students to reflect on the research examined within any given graduate course. Often the expectation is to create a proposal for research in an area of interest found within the course content studied. The genre of a research paper can be challenging for students to identify in an area or focus of research. As discussed in the findings, Professor Green has graduate students focus on questions and how they lead the direction of research. ELL graduate students often have limited experience with expository writing at an academic level while their domestic counterparts have been developing this genre throughout their education. Both Professor Green and Buffay commented on how North American students have the background and preparation to be able to form a research question. ELL graduate students, especially those who have come from a traditional ‘banking model’ education system, may not be aware of how to formulate questions that can be researched. With the ‘banking model’ of education, they are taught to focus on memorizing facts to pass an exam or assessment. Consequently, when ELL graduate students study at an English academic institution, they are asked to question and challenge ideas or research. To paraphrase Dr. Green, it can be challenging for ELL graduate students to formulate a question that leads them down a particular path. Again, it may be the inability of ELL students to make connections to what they have read to model for formulating questions in their own areas of interest.

As a result of the findings and discussion, the areas that this case study has identified as significant are critical thinking and disciplinary conventions. ELL graduate students need the critical thinking skills that enable them to transform knowledge rather than make statements of facts. They need instruction and modelling of how to critically evaluate and analyze topics through reading and discussions. Instruction and modelling will scaffold their learning to make connections within and between resources when researching topics. The areas of development needed for ELL graduate students within disciplinary conventions are discourse knowledge, vocabulary and genres. As Biggs, et al. (1999) suggest that without knowledge of discourse conventions the cognitive load increases for ELLs. Modelling of critical thinking will further enable students to comprehend discourse used in academics. Gee (2015) argues for social practice with
discourse members in a scaffolded learning environment for ELLs to develop their understanding of discourse. Both academic vocabulary and educational terminology are also required to further prepare ELL graduate students in graduate courses. According to Gee (2015) vocabulary learning requires context for meaning to be understood. With further support and instruction with discourse and vocabulary, ELL graduate students will develop their understanding of the various genres within an educational context. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) suggest that with genre literacy, marginalized students will gain social mobility within their academic community. Therefore, the disciplinary conventions of discourse knowledge, vocabulary, and genres are areas of instruction needed for international graduate students to be prepared for their future studies in education. The following chapter will look at recommendations within these areas for assisting ELL graduate students in the Faculty of Education.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

Based on the finding and discussion of this case study the following will review the recommendations for practice, calls for future research and my reflexive turn. Recommendations for practice will consider various methods for EAP instructors and Faculty of Education professors to collaborate to better support ELL graduate students in their courses. Calls for future research will introduce areas of consideration to further support ELL graduate students. My reflexive turn will examine how this case study has influenced my pedagogy in teaching English for academic purposes.

Recommendations for Practice:

Based on the expectations and the observations made by the participants interviewed, there is a need to further prepare ELL graduate students for their studies prior to their coursework. To better prepare ELL graduate students prior to their enrolment in their courses, it is recommended that a preparation and/or a collaborative course be provided for all ELL students regardless of their method of entry into the program. ELL graduate students who have participated in an EAP program at the
institution in this study have had instruction and practice with academic vocabulary, journal articles, presentations, group work, APA formatting and expository writing. However, ELL graduate students who have entered their graduate studies by providing an IELTS score that meets the requirements for the institution may not have had previous exposure or instruction in the aforementioned. Providing a preparation program prior to entry into the Faculty of Education for all ELL graduate students would allow for instruction in these areas, and it would also allow those students who have prior knowledge to help support those with little or no experience within these aspects of their studies.

A preparation course would include both an EAP instructor and a faculty member from the Faculty of Education. It would require both instructors to carefully collaborate to offer their expertise to the course. They would need to identify the vocabulary or specialized terminology used in the field of education. The Education instructor would select and provide the foundational texts that would be required for students to become familiar with prior to their start of the course work. Genres in both writing and speaking would need to be identified and modelled in the preparation course for students to develop their awareness and comprehension. Instruction on APA formatting will be needed in the preparation course so that all students can effectively follow the formatting requirements required in academics. Both the EAP and content instructors would be required for instruction based on their expertise. By providing international graduate students with these skills prior to starting their graduate program at the Faculty of Education, they will be better prepared to meet the expectations and demands of graduate studies.

In addition, collaborative instruction with both an EAP instructor and a Faculty of Education professor would allow for more support for international students throughout their coursework in their first semester in their graduate program. This type of collaboration is also known as an adjunct course to support student learning. For example, a core research course that graduate students are required to enrol in could be taught in conjunction with an EAP support course that is aligned with the course syllabus. Spack (1988) explains that collaboration between content instructors and EAP instructors allows their students to engage with the content of the course while developing the
writing skills needed for their future careers. Collaboration between content instructors and EAP instructors will enhance the discourse knowledge needed for international students to gain membership within the academic community (Benesch, 2001; Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Johns, 1997; Spack, 1988). Once international graduate students have membership in the academic community, this will allow them to find their individual voices. As Benesch (2001) proposes with critical EAP that comprehension of cultural, linguistic, and discursive rules provides students with democratic participation to negotiate for their needs within their academic community. Discourse knowledge was identified by the participants in this case study as an element in which ELL graduate students need instruction. Offering an EAP course taught in conjunction with a content course would also provide exposure and practice with various academic genres within the Faculty of Education. Knowledge of genre is needed for international students who are entering academic studies at an English language institution to successfully participate in their learning (Belcher, 1995; Biggs et al., 1999; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Paltridge, 2004; Shih, 1986; Spack, 1997; Swales, 1990). Collaboration between a content course professor and an EAP instructor will allow for students to be supported with instruction by the content expert and the EAP expert. Offering expertise in both areas to ELL students will allow for each instructor to provide the support within each area for students to best develop the knowledge and skills needed to successfully participate in and complete their courses. If this is offered to ELL graduate students within their first semester of studies, then they will be better prepared for and more knowledgeable of academic discourse and genres which would also enable them to develop their critical thinking skills for their other courses in the graduate program.

However, the challenges for collaborative teaching to occur between two departments would exist in time, funding, and course development. This was also identified as a challenge by the participants in this case study. When asked about the interest in collaborating to support ELL graduate students, Professor Green said, “…it takes work to make that commitment to set aside time and day and to actually do it.” Additionally, funding such a collaboration may also be challenging when attempting to bring two departments together. Limitations and restrictions with funding research may pose a challenge for a pilot project to occur even if instructors are able to offer their time
to engage in creating a course. Furthermore, course development and approval would also be a challenge to meet quality assurance standards at the institution of study. The course approval process would also require time once the course is designed by those who would be willing to collaborate to design the course to meet the needs of ELL graduate students.

As a result of this case study, I recommend collaboration between the Faculty of Education and the EAP program to develop a preparation course or adjunct course offered to ELL graduate students in the Faculty of Education to provide the language and academic support they need to successfully engage and participate in their studies.


calls for further research:

Based on the findings of this case study, the next step to explore for supporting ELL graduate students would be to approach additional research in the Faculty of Education from their perspective. An additional case study could be done to further understand ELL graduate students’ perceptions of the graduate course requirements and expectations. Investigating from the students’ perspective will allow them to identify what they feel they need in additional support for successful participation in their coursework. This would allow for further insight to bridge any gaps between faculty members’ expectations and requirements for graduate studies and those of the ELL graduate students. Expanding the research to include the ELL graduate students could further validate the findings through triangulation of the themes identified in this case study.

Moreover, an additional case study could explore the perspectives of EAP instructors with academic literacy among ELLs within the program upon entry and exit of the EAP program at the institution in this case study. Identifying themes that EAP instructors are observing could offer further insight into what supports may be needed in the EAP program and beyond to assist international students. This also has the potential to further validate the finding of this case study with the potential themes of doing a case study with EAP instructors.

In addition, further research could explore the needs of ELL graduate students in other programs that have higher international graduate student enrolment. Case studies could be done with both faculty members and students to identify the expectations of
professors and students in those programs. Professors could explain their expectations are of graduate students, and students could describe what support they need to meet the expectations and requirements of their graduate programs.

Therefore, future research can further enhance and support ELL graduate students to gain from every opportunity to learn in their graduate studies. With further research in the Faculty of Education, the EAP program, and other faculties with high international student enrolment rates, the institution in this case study can provide a better opportunity in supporting international students’ graduate studies. In turn, this could further enhance the reputation of the institution for future recruitment of international students. Additional research could also provide better support for faculty members in other graduate programs in preparing and supporting their teaching of future students. As a result, future research can provide support for ELL graduate students and faculty members for both learning and teaching.

_My Reflexive Turn:_

My experience with engaging in this case study allowed me to reflect on my own practice in teaching in an EAP program. I have engaged in a direct approach to instructing my students and scaffolding their learning in three areas: critical thinking, making connections, and genres. I have found that being direct in instructional methods in these three areas has provided more opportunities for my students to develop and improve in these areas.

I have found that by modelling what critical thinking looks like both in spoken and written discourse allows students to understand and reflect on their own ways of knowing. I have discussed with them the expectations of academic study and how critical thinking plays an important role in their future studies. I explain what a Canadian university teaching and learning environment is like and ask my students to reflect on their previous learning experience and learning environment in comparison. I want my ELLs to understand that their learning experience in my classroom is not only preparing them for their language needs but also their academic skills. I have found that many of my students come from educational backgrounds that are grounded in traditional teaching methods using the ‘banking model’. Many of the international students in the EAP
program at the institution in this study have been taught to pass a test rather than critically evaluating and analyzing ideas presented to them. It takes time and practice for students to critically evaluate issues. To assist in critical thinking, I have students examine various texts, audio, and videos to make connections between any of the ideas presented.

In addition to critical thinking, I provide the opportunity for students to make connections between the resources provided for reading and listening because we use a variety of themes throughout the semester. By using themes, it provides the opportunity for students to identify relationships between ideas to enable their critical thinking skills. I model and guide students in how to approach the resources by asking them make reference to previous resources and ideas presented to connect to a new resource presented. ELL students are then able to use this skill for themselves as we progress through the semester. I feel this guidance has enhanced their preparation for academic studies.

Furthermore, presenting students with various academic genres allows students to have examples to reflect on or model after writing and speaking in their academic studies. Again, I provide direct instruction in examining how the text, discussion, or lecture is presented. In the EAP program, academic journal articles, textbook chapters, and magazine articles are used to examine discourse and organization. This allows ELL students to compare texts to analyze the use of informal and formal language. Exposure to various genres offers ELL students opportunities to understand and adapt their language to an academic environment which will allow for access to membership within their academic field of study. Also providing various genres of speech allow them to see examples of the organization of a formal presentation or lecture while a panel discussion allows them to see how turn-taking occurs and ideas are built upon one another. I provide opportunities for students to engage in these genres to further prepare ELL students for their academic programs.

As a result of my research, I have had the opportunity to reflect on my previous teaching practices in an EAP program. I have adapted my instructional methods to be direct in instructing my students in critical thinking, making connections, and examining genres. Providing direct instruction to my students has provided them with awareness of the purpose of the strategies, tasks, and activities completed in the EAP program to be
better prepared for their academic programs. Direct instruction and modelling have allowed my students to apply what they have learned to their own learning to develop these skills for themselves to be successful and independent learners that they need to be. I feel that completing this case study has made me more reflective on my practices and a better EAP instructor.

In conclusion, this case study has identified the expectations of several professors in the Faculty of Education and has provided their observations of what ELL graduate students are able to do in their second and/or other language. With the insights that this case study has offered, I believe that further collaboration between Faculty of Education professors and EAP instructors should be developed and provide a preparation course or an adjunct course to support both instructors and ELL graduate students in teaching and learning. Further research needs to be done by investigating the needs of the Faculty of Education ELL graduate students from their perspective. Additionally, other departments with a high enrolment of international students can have similar case studies completed to identify the types of support needed in teaching and learning. In my experience of this case study, my instructional practices have evolved with the observations made by the interview participants in hopes to better support and prepare my students’ entry into their academic studies.
REFERENCES


[https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2008.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2008.09.001)


Appendix A

LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: An analysis of the academic literacy of first year international graduate students in a Faculty of Education program

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Wendy Sager from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. The results of this research will contribute to completion of a master’s thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Dr. Andrew Allen: Faculty Supervisor.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this critical inquiry is to analyse what academic literacy skills first-year international graduate students have when studying in the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:
Participate in an individual interview about the academic literacy expectations that you have for international graduate students within graduate courses.

The individual interview will be digitally audio recorded. The individual interview will be recorded with the consent of the participant. The approximate length of the individual interview will be 90 minutes.

You have been identified as an appropriate participant because you are teaching or have taught graduate level courses within the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

You may feel uncomfortable at times responding to questions because you are describing your experiences with international graduate students within your faculty/ workplace.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
The goals of this research are to better prepare international graduate students who are non-native speakers of English for their academic studies and contribute to curriculum development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs.

Your participation in this research will provide essential feedback into preparing future international graduate students to study in the Faculty of Education.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will not receive any form of payment for their participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

To ensure confidentiality, no names of participants, names of students or identifiable events will be provided during the interview. The consent to participate in research form will be stored separately from transcribed audio recordings and notes.

All written records, including the transcription of the focus group or individual interview, will be securely stored until completion of this research (approximately 8 months), and then destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the digital audio recordings unless participants prefer the academic advisor to facilitate the focus group or interview. The digital audio recordings will be deleted after the transcription. Individual interview participants will validate the information transcribed before the audio is deleted for member checking.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may withdraw from the study prior to completing the survey. You may withdraw from the focus group during the meeting, but your data will remain prior to your withdrawal. Individual interview participants can withdraw their data up until member-checking is completed through email. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

If you want to withdraw your data from the study, please email the researcher stating that you would no longer want to participate in the research.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS
A summary of the research will be made available to participants through the Leddy Library Scholarship at UWindsor website

Web address: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/

Date when results are available: ____________________________

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Investigator                                    Date
Appendix B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: An analysis of the academic literacy of first year international graduate students in a Faculty of Education program

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Wendy Sager, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. The results of this research will contribute to completion of a master’s thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Dr. Andrew Allen: Faculty Supervisor.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this critical inquiry is to analyze what academic literacy skills first-year international graduate students have when studying in the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in an individual interview regarding the academic literacy expectations that you have for international graduate students within graduate courses.

The individual interview will be digitally audio recorded with your consent (Appendix I). The approximate length of the interview will be 90 minutes.

You have been identified as an appropriate participant because you are teaching or have taught graduate level courses within the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

You may feel uncomfortable at times responding to questions because you are describing your experiences with international graduate students within your faculty/ workplace. If this occurs, the researcher will move to the next question.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

72
The goals of this research are to better prepare international graduate students who are non-native speakers of English for their academic studies and contribute to curriculum development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs.

Your participation in this research will provide essential feedback into preparing future international graduate students to study in the Faculty of Education.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
Participants will not receive any form of payment for their participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

To ensure confidentiality, no names of participants, names of students or identifiable events, will be provided during the interview. The consent to participate in research form will be stored separately from transcribed audio recordings and notes.

All written records, including the transcription of the interview, will be securely stored until completion of this research (approximately 8 months), and then destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the digital audio recordings with the exception of the academic advisor facilitating the interview. The digital audio recordings will be deleted after the participant verifies the transcription.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may withdraw your data from the study prior to completing member-checking of the interview transcript. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

You will have two weeks after the transcript is sent electronically to withdraw your data from the study.

If you want to withdraw your data from the study, please email the researcher stating that you would no longer participate in the research.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS
A summary of the research will be made available to participants through the Leddy Library Scholarship at UWindsor website
Web address: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/
Date when results are available: ____________________________

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study: An analysis of the academic literacy of first year international graduate students in a Faculty of Education program as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

__________________________________________
Name of Participant

__________________________________________ Date
Signature of Participant

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

__________________________________________ Date
Signature of Investigator
Appendix C

Call for Participation Request
(Email request)

Dear Faculty member,

My name is Wendy Sager, and I am a Master of Education Thesis candidate at the University of Windsor working under the supervision of Dr. Andrew Allen in the Faculty of Education.

I am requesting your participation in individual interviews for my research entitled: An analysis of the academic literacy of first year international graduate students in a Faculty of Education program.

This research has been cleared by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB # 20-104).

The purpose of this study is to analyse what academic literacy skills first-year international graduate students have when studying in the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor.

The approximate length of individual interview is 90 minutes.

The individual interviews will ask about the academic literacy expectations that you have for international graduate students within graduate courses.

The goals of this research are to better prepare international graduate students who are non-native speakers of English for their academic studies and contribute to curriculum development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs.

Your participation in this research will provide essential feedback into preparing future international graduate students to study in the Faculty of Education.
If you would like to participate in this research, please respond to this email at your earliest convenience. I would also appreciate if you indicate 2 or 3 possible dates and times when you would be able to meet. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at sager2@uwindsor.ca.

Thank you,

Wendy
Appendix D

Individual Interview Protocol
Questions from Ann M. John’s Text, role and context (1997, p. 78)

I will welcome the participant to the interview and thank them for participating.

The participant will then be given the letter of information to read through. If they have any questions, they will be answered at that time. They will be provided with the consent for participation form and consent for audio recording. At this time, I would then ask them to sign the consent documents to demonstrate their consent. The participant will be reminded that they cannot withdraw their data from the research after the transcribed interview has been validated by member-checking. Participants will be reminded not to identify any specific students or individual event related to their students. All information will remain confidential.

Upon collection of the forms, I will begin asking the participant the following questions:

1. What challenges have you observed your international graduate students’ having when reading assigned texts?

2. How do you want your students to approach readings?

3. What are your graduate classes like: discussion or lecture-based? What challenges if any do you observe your students having in discussion-based/lecture-based classes?

4. What kinds of writing do you require your students to do? What are you observing in their production of written work?
5. What do you think students should know or be able to do when they write for a graduate class?

6. What critical thinking, reading and writing skills are you observing in your graduate courses with international students?

7. What would you like your students to be able to do with their critical thinking, reading and writing skills that you are not observing in your class?

8. Would you consider collaborating with EAP instructors in curriculum development for EAP programs, support programs or content courses? Why or why not?

Upon completion of the questions and discussion, I will let the participant know that this is the end of the interview. I will thank them for their time and participation. I will remind the participant when the results will be made available to them and the web link.
VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Wendy M. Sager

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, ON

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1974

EDUCATION: John McGregor Secondary School, Chatham, ON, 1993

University of Windsor, B.A., Windsor, ON, 2004

University of Windsor, B.Ed., Windsor, ON, 2012