

Surviving Through Uncertainties: Perceptions and Experiences of Chinese EAL Writers in FYC
Courses at a Canadian University

by

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B.A., Shenyang Normal University, China, 2004

M.A., Shenyang Normal University, China, 2007

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Abstract

Canadian universities and colleges have experienced a rapid increase in students who speak English as an additional language (EAL). A central concern of this change involves how to support these students to navigate their studies abroad, especially in academic writing. Against this broader context, this dissertation investigates the writing trajectories and socialization experiences of six Chinese EAL learners in their first-year composition (FYC) courses at a Canadian university. This study draws on an ecological perspective toward language learning and use (Dufva, 2013; van Lier, 2004; 2008a, 2010), as well as theories of (second) language academic socialization (Duff, 2010; 2019; Duff & Anderson, 2015). To capture students' lived experiences in a situated context, a multiple-case study method was employed to include multiple perspectives toward students' writing practices and socialization experiences in navigating their written assignments and activities.

The findings of this study showed that EAL students experienced challenges in relearning language skills, meeting course expectations and conventions, navigating intensive readings, and negotiating self-positioning with native English-speaking peers. Coupled with faculty perceptions, the findings highlight that composition instructors may underestimate EAL students' emotional pressure related to academic writing when they seek support. This study further uncovered interconnected factors impacting EAL students' writing experiences at various levels of the local context. Most importantly, it provides evidence of learner agency among EAL students in accessing learning affordances and socialization processes. By adding an ecological understanding of EAL learners' writing practices and socialization experiences in the context of FYC courses, this study recommends establishing an agency rich and networked environment that could empower EAL learners to thrive in FYC context.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Amidst the internationalization of higher education and the proliferation of global student mobility, an increasing number of international students have chosen Canada as their destination for education in recent years. By December 2017, Canada had already surpassed its International Education Strategy goal of boosting international student numbers to 450,000 by 2022 (CBIE, 2020). In addition to contributing to economic revenues, international students play an essential role in producing and disseminating knowledge and strengthening cross-cultural exchanges with domestic students in Canadian universities (Guo & Guo, 2017). At both undergraduate and graduate levels in Canadian universities, Chinese students comprise the largest group and account for approximately 30% of the total international students – a trend¹ that has continued to increase yearly (CBIE, 2016). Using the research site of a medium-sized Canadian University for this study, approximately 2,400 of the university's 18,400 undergraduates were international students. Among them, Chinese students who use English as an Additional Language (EAL) rank at the top, with around 1,400 students enrolled in the academic year of 2017-2018 (Citation redacted for anonymity).

Faced with the growing presence of Chinese EAL students, research has focused on their experiences studying abroad, especially the various challenges that students have encountered within both their personal lives and studies during their stay in Canada because of their language barriers, historical and cultural backgrounds, and different learning approaches compared to their domestic peers (Gu, 2008; Hu, 2010; Liu, 2016; Wu, 2015; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Scholars have also pointed out how academic writing constitutes a major challenge for Chinese EAL learners' successful engagement in their academic studies

¹ Given the pandemic of COVID-19, Chinese international students have been directly affected by quarantine measures and air travel cancellations. They may have to reconsider their study options. The long-term impact on this trend is uncertain.

(Anderson, 2017; Heng, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Therefore, understanding the writing needs and challenges for EAL students and impacting factors is of crucial importance to provide these learners with appropriate pedagogical support for their writing process and academic success.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although previous studies that have reported on the writing challenges of EAL learners are very informative, some stakeholders or researchers tend to frame the experiences of EAL students primarily from a deficit perspective with mainly negative assumptions about their language capacities or previous learning experiences (cf. Heng, 2018; Marshall, 2020). Asian students, especially Chinese EAL students, are often stereotyped as passive and uncritical thinkers who speak English poorly (Guo & Guo, 2017; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Wu, 2015). As Marshall (2020) recently pointed out, there is unresolved tension between instructors and EAL learners in some Canadian universities since “students are assessed by monolingual, formal academic English” (p. 145). Impacted by monolingual norms, instructors may frame their pedagogical practices around a prevalent institutional ideology that views EAL learners as deficient (Marshall, 2020) as opposed to multilingual and multicultural students with a range of positionalities, experiences, and attributes. Furthermore, studies indicate that the growing presence of multicultural students does not naturally lead to their inclusion in classroom practices, despite the Canadian government’s prioritization of internationalization (Anderson, 2020a; Surtees, 2019). Focusing on the experiences of international students, researchers have also shown a misalignment between the institutional policies of attracting international students and the lived practices of international students on Canadian campuses (Anderson, 2015; Guo & Guo, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to explore EAL students’ lived experiences in local contexts from a

holistic perspective, rather than exclusively focusing on their challenges or deficiencies in navigating their academic studies.

There are currently few educational resources and research concerns that specifically address first-year university academic writing, including EAL issues in a Canadian context. Most studies on EAL students in FYC courses are based on U.S. contexts. Given the growing presence of EAL students on Canadian campuses, a commonly used syllabus, which is traditionally designed for native English students, might not work for EAL writers. Compared to the FYC context in the United States, which has a variety of writing programs and well-developed research based on the writing experiences of EAL writers, the first-year composition instruction and research have their specific features in a Canadian context (Graves & Graves, 2012; Landry, 2016; Smith, 2006). Landry (2016) summarized three aspects featuring Canadian writing that include the belletristic tradition (teaching writing through appreciation and imitation of English literature), diverse institutional locations for instruction, and resistance to the U.S. model of freshman composition. With specific regard to EAL writers, there is also little research attention focused on how these groups of learners navigate their writing trajectories and make progress by specifically targeting first-year composition courses as a research site.

In summary, the growing presence of EAL learners in mainstream composition classrooms and the research intention to challenge the deficit model viewing students' experiences provide the rationale for further studies exploring EAL learners' nuanced writing trajectories and socialization experiences from a holistic perspective. Additionally, the promising field of FYC in a Canadian context is justification for this study to further explore the interplay between contextual factors and their impact on EAL learners' writing performance, which is crucial for their academic success during study abroad.

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions of the Study

This study is situated in the context of ever-increasing awareness and interest in the issues of EAL writers in mainstream composition classrooms, as well as attempts in seeking the ways that composition faculty can support EAL students' needs in their academic writing, since writing plays a crucial role in EAL learners' academic performance at Canadian universities. Due to their prominent presence in Canadian higher education institutions and documented academic challenges in writing, I focused on Mandarin-speaking Chinese EAL students who enrolled in FYC courses and had no previous experience living and studying in an English-medium country. The primary purpose of this study is to develop a holistic understanding of the writing trajectories of Chinese EAL students, including the challenges they encountered, changes and progress they made, as well as how they negotiated both resources and relationships in improving their academic writing practice and socialization experiences. In light of the reviewed literature, this study was guided explicitly by five research questions:

1. What academic writing needs and challenges do Chinese EAL students perceive and identify when taking the first-year academic writing requirement course COMP 100?
2. What writing needs and challenges of Chinese EAL students do composition faculty identify?
3. How are the two groups of students and composition faculty similar to or different from each other?
4. What are the major factors in the learning context impacting EAL students' perceptions and writing experiences identified by both composition faculty and Chinese EAL students?
5. How do Chinese EAL students use resources to develop their academic writing skills and improve their socialization experiences?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The results of this study have potential significance in several respects. Theoretically, this study provides an ecological understanding of EAL students' writing experiences in a Canadian FYC context. While research has investigated the complexities of L2 writing among different population groups in various contexts (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Haggerty, 2019; Morton et al., 2015; Stuart, 2012; Zhang & Zhou, 2010), especially the challenges that students encountered, contributing factors, and outcomes, very few studies have applied an ecological perspective to investigate the academic writing issues of EAL learners (e.g., Garner & Borg, 2005; van Lier, 2004). An ecological perspective investigates the dynamic interactions between participants and their environment and captures the changes that participants experience over time. Additionally, informed by (second) language socialization (Duff & Anderson, 2015; Duff, 2010; 2019), and focused primarily on the written academic discourse socialization processes of adult second language learners, this study uncovers impacting factors within macro-meso-micro levels of context. Coupled with the multiple-case study design, which involves multiple sources and perspectives, this study further extends the understanding of how EAL writers enacted learner agency in seeking affordances for improving their academic writing and socialization experiences in the local context of Canadian FYC.

Pedagogically, this research provides practical suggestions for composition faculty and offers insights into the perceived challenges, struggles, and efforts regarding academic writing issues from the perspectives of both Chinese EAL students and composition faculty. Benefiting from an in-depth understanding of the writing needs and trajectories in students' interactions with various learning environments, the administrators and instructors of FYC courses and intensive writing programs will become more capable of making informed pedagogical decisions on how to frame EAL students' challenges in a holistic way, design inclusive writing activities, provide effective written feedback, and support their exertions of

learner agency among EAL students through building a supportive and resourceful learning environment.

1.5 Situatedness and Positionality

The intention of this study grew out of my personal, academic, and professional experiences. Since starting my PhD journey in 2015, I have gradually realized the importance of academic writing in English at every stage of my study and how challenging it can be for EAL users from different cultural and educational backgrounds. I received my bachelor's degree in English Teaching and a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics. Learning English for several years, I became sensitive to language use in real life and was keen to learn how to navigate my academic studies by writing academically. Furthermore, my eight years of experience working as an English teacher at a Sino-American cooperative college in China nourished my interest in language development and the challenges encountered by undergraduate students. I was also very impressed by the stories that my previous students shared with me when they studied abroad as transfer students. EAL undergraduates, especially in first-year studies, have faced the challenge of transitioning from high school learning to academic study at university and have met with dramatic differences across two countries and cultures. Additionally, my previous research interests in Chinese EAL writers in EAP pathway programs directed my attention to those who transfer from EAL environments into first-year composition classrooms after completing their programs or taking EAP courses and mainstream classes. In particular, I wondered how these students could navigate the academic writing in their composition classes. Thus, the topic of this study came to fruition through a combination of my personal and academic experiences, as well as the attempt to investigate EAL learners' writing trajectories.

These cumulative interests and experiences provide me with both an insider and outsider perspective on the research process. As an international student, I have encountered

similar challenges, trajectories, and progress. However, I am also aware that my involvement as the “primary tool” for conducting this qualitative case study will inevitably shape the interpretation of the participants’ stories and experiences. My positionality and subjectivity, in particular, may have impacted the ways I interacted with the research participants either in face-to-face interviews or by electronic communication via email. While recognizing my subjective influence on conducting the research, I actively guarded against imposing my assumptions or personal attitudes on the perception and experiences of participants during the data collection and analysis phases.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

While many of the terms used throughout the study are discussed at length in the literature review, I present the most common terms below.

1.6.1 EAL learners

English as an additional language refers to learners whose first language is not English. The learner may already be fluent in several other languages or dialects, so the term English as a second language (ESL) is not always inappropriate. Although L2 (second language) is still prevalent in fields such as Applied Linguistics, scholars and researchers have already acknowledged the limitations of using ESL and embraced using the term “EAL.” All student participants in this study speak Mandarin Chinese as their first language. Some of them also speak Cantonese or other local dialects (which are fundamentally different from Mandarin). Thus, it is appropriate to describe them as EAL learners.

1.6.2 First-Year Composition (FYC)

First-year composition or writing, also known as freshman composition, is an introductory core curriculum writing course in colleges or universities in North America. In the current study, FYC serves as the setting where EAL students (including international English L1 students) take intensive writing courses with their native English-speaking (NES)

Canadian peers together in mainstream classrooms. The target course of this study, COMP 100 (pseudonym), is a required composition course for first-year students including EAL students. According to the course overview, this English Department's undergraduate writing course is aimed at introducing students to university-level reading and writing. It enables them to progress toward an advanced literacy level through analysis and practices of core transferable skills regardless of their programs of study. In this study, I use the term first-year composition and first-year academic writing interchangeably.

1.6.3 L2 Writing and Writers

The term L2 (second language) writing refers to writing that an individual does in any language other than their first (Leki et al., 2008). The field of L2 writing is interdisciplinary and is situated in several academic disciplines, including applied linguistics, foreign language education, composition studies, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Drawing on various theoretical and methodological insights from these fields, researchers in L2 writing focus on various second or foreign languages in various contexts and educational levels (Matsuda, 2012).

According to the Conference on College Composition and Communication Statement (CCCC) in the field of Second Language Writing, L2 writers (addressed as multilingual writers in the revised version since 2014) are defined as follows:

Second language writers include international visa students, refugees, permanent residents, and naturalized and native-born citizens of the United States and Canada. Many of these students have grown up speaking languages other than English at home, in their communities and schools; others began to acquire English at a very young age and have used it alongside their native languages. To many, English may be a third, fourth or fifth language. (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2001, Part one, p. 669)

This term of L2 has limitations, such as not demonstrating the heterogeneous nature of second language writers who have various proficiencies, linguistic backgrounds, and different language needs. Some scholars in L2 scholarship, however, may use the term “L2” interchangeably with “ESL,” “English Language Learner” (ELL), “Non-native English Speaker” (NNES), or “multilingual student,” regardless of their slight distinctions in the context of higher education. My study participants are international students who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). They are on an F1 visa, which means they are in Canada with the primary aim of receiving an education. The use of “L2 writers” in this dissertation is for the convenience of including the literature in L2 writing. Although L2 writers can serve as the umbrella term for the current study, I use Chinese EAL specifically to identify the targeted participants whenever relevant. When reviewing the literature, the terms EAL and L2 writers, EAP writing, and academic writing are interchangeably used without distinction.

1.7 Overview of the Study

This dissertation consists of six further chapters. In Chapter 2, I discuss the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of this study: an ecological perspective to language learning and (second) language socialization theory, as well as the applications of sociocultural oriented approaches to academic writing research. Following that, I discuss the impact of the broader context of internationalization of Canadian higher education on Chinese EAL students’ academic studies and the empirical research on EAL writers in the FYC context. Chapter 3 discusses the research design for the present study, including the research context, selection of participants, data collection tools, and procedures.

From Chapter 4 to 6, I present the findings of the data analysis according to three main themes: comparison of perspectives of Chinese EAL students and composition faculties in terms of writing needs and challenges that EAL learners encountered; an ecological

understanding of the factors that impact students' academic writing trajectories; as well as the enactment of EAL students' agency and resourcefulness. In Chapter 7, I recapitulate the main findings, discuss theoretical contributions to the investigated writing issues in a local context, and put forward pedagogical suggestions to support EAL students by creating an agency-rich and supportive classroom environment.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter consists of three sections: the first section articulates the overarching theoretical framework that guides this study, which includes an ecological view to language learning and use (Dufva, 2013; van Lier, 2004, 2010), and theories of (second) language socialization (LS) (Duff, 2007, 2010; Duff & Anderson, 2015). It also reviews academic writing scholarship that has utilized explicitly or implicitly an ecological perspective or LS theories. By situating the current study within the broader context of the internationalization of higher education, the second section discusses its impact and current trends of EAL learners, followed by a more focused discussion of studies reporting on Chinese international student experiences in Canadian universities and a critical analysis of the deficit stereotypes and negative labels placed on those students by academic and social discourses. The third section concentrates on interpreting the research context: EAL writers in FYC courses. This section focuses on the central issues related to EAL learners in the context of FYC courses. Following that, this section discusses the features of Canadian writing studies and how this present study could potentially contribute to the research in this field in a Canadian context.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study mainly draws on an ecological perspective to language learning (van Lier, 2004, 2010) and theories of (second) language socialization (Duff, 2010; 2019; Duff & Anderson, 2015) as the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings for viewing the academic writing practices of EAL learners in their first-year writing courses. In this part, I first explain what an ecological point of view means to language learning and use, as well as its crucial tenets. Second, I explore the approach of (second) language socialization and why LS is a compatible theory to an ecological perspective that guides this study. These theoretical framings holistically inform the research questions, survey design, interview questions, and data analysis. Based on the theoretical discussions, I report on relevant studies addressing

academic writing issues from an ecological perspective or frameworks of (second) language socialization (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Godfrey, 2015; Haggerty, 2019). Considering the scarcity of empirical studies in this line of research, some studies related to academic writing that might employ an ecological perspective implicitly (e.g., Canagarajah, 2016; Morton et al., 2015) or closely adopt a sociocultural approach (e.g., Lei, 2016) are also included in the current discussion.

2.1.1 An Ecological Perspective to Language Learning and Use

An ecological perspective on language learning is rooted historically and theoretically in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT). In the 1990s, van Lier (2004) proposed an interdisciplinary term, *Ecology of language learning* that connected education and language learning from an ecological perspective, by mainly drawing his ideas from sociocultural theory, semiotics, and ecology. According to van Lier, an ecological perspective to language learning shares considerable affinities with a sociocultural view. Both perspectives highlight the role of context in language learning. An ecological context is physical, social, and symbolic. Another key notion that both theories share is the concept of mediation, which views language learning as mediated through interaction with materials, people, institutions, or artifacts. To further advance SCT theory, an ecological approach attempts to assemble and embrace various theoretical models as a shared endeavour (van Lier, 2004). In order to deal with the complexities of the research context, for instance, Engeström's (1987) model of Activity Theory (AT) is influentially applied in connecting learning activities, such as academic writing, with their surrounding contexts. Another contextualized model is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecosystems, which conceptualizes educational contexts into several interrelated ecosystems: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro- levels. As elaborated by van Lier (2010), the value of Bronfenbrenner's model is not the model itself, but its focus on the relationships among each system, which potentially allow an investigation in how the

activities of one scale impact those on another scale. Inspired by Bronfenbrenner's model, the Douglas Fir Group (DFG, 2016) further developed the model at the macro-meso-micro levels that globally impacts SLA. By embracing these models as analytical frameworks, an ecological perspective presents a new way to view language learning and teaching as relations among certain participants with the holistic environment, which is mediated by interactions and relationships.

As a holistic and contextualized framework, an ecological approach to language learning fundamentally differs from cognitive approaches and bears similarities with a sociocultural perspective, with its own featured tenets. As Steffensen and Kramsch (2017) summarized, the main tenets of an ecological approach to SLA include: language learning and use is emergent; affordances in the environment play a crucial role; language plays a mediated function in education; and, language learning experiences are subjective and historic. In essence, an ecological perspective to language learning pays great attention to the processes of language learning, mediated activities of learners, and multiple layers of language use, as well as interaction within the interconnectedness of a bounded system at physical, symbolic, and social levels in the environment (Dufva, 2013; van Lier, 2004, 2010). Inspired by van Lier's ideas, Dufva (2013) further placed the dynamic and interactive relations between agents and their environment at a central stage and advocated that language learning is a developmental process in which individuals develop their own capacities varying across purpose, modalities, and situations. According to Dufva (2013), such a learning process could be called "appropriation," which emphasizes the sociocultural feature of language learning as participatory and communicative. In addition to the key concepts of context and mediation, ecologically, the notions of affordance and agency play key roles in exploring the relationship between individual organisms and the environment, which is further elaborated below.

Affordance for Language Learning. One key conceptual construct for understanding ecologically is the term “affordance,” which van Lier (2004) has suggested as an alternative to the term “input” in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). To be specific, van Lier believes “input” presents a view of language as a fixed code, while “affordance” denotes what is available to a learner; that is, resources that the learner can perceive. Taking the original construct of affordance from psychologist Gibson (1979), van Lier expanded this concept to language education and defined it as the perceived opportunities for actions or dynamic relationships between the environment and learners as agents. According to van Lier, affordances should be understood as relational and reciprocal. That means, learning resources are not yet affordances until learners as agents perceive, reflect on, and take actions on these resources, which involves a dynamic process of mutual interaction between the learners and the environment. In parallel, for example, when engaging in academic writing activities in an English-mediated classroom, a theme-based writing assignment, such as, an essay based on the history of music, may provide ample information for NESs in the target language with rich linguistic resources and cultural knowledge; however, it may only afford limited language usage to EAL learners who come from a different educational and sociocultural background. Therefore, more thoroughly and appropriately considering the affordances of language learning for participants in their specific contexts is both essential and meaningful.

Learner Agency. Perceiving and exploring the affordances of language learning underscores the importance of learner agency. From an ecological perspective, agency is the capacity to act “mediated by social, interactional, cultural, institutional and other contextual factors” (van Lier, 2008a, p. 171). Defining agency in this way means that the capacity of a learner is a socially constructed behaviour rather than the property of individual agents. In addition, van Lier (2008a) proposed three core features of learner agency: (1) initiative or

self-regulation; (2) contextual interdependence; (3) an awareness of the responsibility for one's own actions vis-à-vis the environment. These features are informative for examining EAL writers' agency in the current study. Specifically, language learning may take place when learners exercise their agency by perceiving surrounding opportunities and resources, as well as acting on their perceptions with deeper critical awareness. In addition, the teaching and learning environment that provides rich resources and meaningful activities provides affordance for learners to perceive and engage in the language (van Lier, 2004). Language learning is, therefore, an emergent phenomenon triggered by the availability of affordances in the environment, as well as both learners' awareness and willingness to participate in the learning activities. The constructs of affordance and learner agency aligned with other ecological properties are applied in this study not only to identify the needs and challenges perceived by Chinese EAL learners, but also to investigate how they navigate various resources in their interactions and engagements with the surrounding environments.

2.1.2 (Second) Language Socialization

Another key theory that has guided this study is (second) language socialization (Duff, 2010; Duff & Anderson 2015). Language socialization theory examines the activities and processes of learning in which novices (newcomers) learn a language and/or cultural knowledge of the target community through “interactions with others who are more proficient in the language and its cultural practices” (Duff, 2010, p. 172). In contrast to linguistic or cognitive approaches to SLA, the scope of LS is broader in examining the language learning process at macro-meso-micro levels, often by learning about cultural and social knowledge, ideologies, identities, or affective stances through language (Duff, 2019; Duff & Talmy, 2011). As Duff (2019) pointed out, LS allows researchers to examine learners' experiences and development within and across various levels of social contexts. Specifically, second language (L2) socialization differs from first language (L1) socialization processes in which

young learners are often socialized or apprenticed into new identities and practices by caregivers, teachers, and experts, as well as having easy and ample access to and participation in community practices. L2 adult learners, however, are often more mature in cognition and emotions and possess a greater sense of agency than child learners who are dominantly featured in L1 socialization research (Anderson & Duff, 2015). As Duff and Talmy (2011) emphasize, L2 socialization research needs to address “manifold complexities of children or adults with already developed repertoires of linguistic, discursive, and cultural practices as they encounter new ones” (p. 97). From an ecological perspective, the concept of socialization also differs from L1 socialization when it comes to adult L2 learners. These adult L2 learners need to learn non-native culture and literacy practices through a second language despite having already socialized into their L1 communities, and they have their own perspectives on issues such as identity and power relations (Steffensen & Kramsch, 2017). L2 socialization, therefore, is a complex, nonlinear, and dynamic process of activities, which manifests in various forms of interaction and often leads to unexpected outcomes.

With both being featured as social and interactional-oriented theories, (second) language socialization and an ecological perspective to language learning can serve as compatible theories to guide this study. An ecological perspective contextually situates the current study within its surrounding environments and focuses on exploring EAL writing trajectories by their interactions with affordances in the environments, with the enactment of learner agency. In addition to a strong commitment to an ecological account of language learning, LS theories can contribute uniquely to a deeper understanding of EAL learners’ enculturation process by focusing on their social and cultural learning through language (Steffensen & Kramsch, 2017). It also helps to capture the diversity of novice learners as agents who possess their own repertoire and identities, as well as processes of engagement into their discourse communities (Duff & Talmy, 2011). From a contemporary LS

perspective, as Duff and Doherty (2015) explain, learner agency plays a crucial role in facilitating or impeding the process of language socialization since “learners bring their agency to bear on the affordances of their personal context and the resources available to them” (p. 69). In this study, EAL learners negotiated English learning and academic writing practices simultaneously in the context of FYC courses. In addition to the external socialization of various sources and resources, this study also considered the construct of internal or self-socialization (Anderson, 2017); particularly, examining the role of agency played in participants’ socialization processes through employing their internal resources, as well as interacting and engaging with external factors. Therefore, for the purpose of better understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of academic writing of EAL learners, an ecological perspective and second LS theories are employed as compatible frameworks to guide the current study.

2.1.3 Empirical Studies on Academic Writing Issues from Sociocultural Perspectives

An ecological perspective taken by this study can be categorized into sociocultural orientations since it intended to explore how language learning and use are shaped by social and cultural forces, as well as factors in learners’ surrounding environment. Although an ecological framework has found its place in the field of SLA and has been incorporated in mainstream theories (Steffensen & Kramsch, 2017), a direct application of this approach in L2 writing or literacy development is relatively rare (e.g., Garner & Borg, 2005; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). In Garner and Borg (2005), an ecological view of learning was applied as a principle for organizing an EAP program. Through setting an ecology of communication, the authors (also instructors) designed their EAP courses by situating the learners in an academic community sharing the goal of developing their academic genres, meeting specific disciplinary expectations, and engaging in a variety of literate practices through the process of mutual interaction and academic enculturation. In an EAP writing class, as the author

illustrated, students were asked to write a 1,500-word primary research paper based on materials they discussed in a previous seminar. With a focus on specific academic content, their course operated more like an academic university course than a typical language course. Several implications can be drawn from the design and implementation of an ecological approach in EAP context. First, an ecological view reminds instructors and researchers to situate their teaching within its social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Without considering students' needs in their local context, instructors may find it hard to effectively support students' learning and socialization experiences. Second, an ecological perspective provides a solid theoretical foundation for content-based teaching and serves as an overarching principle for pedagogical practices. Therefore, an ecological approach to language learning in EAP contexts has the potential to be further explored either as an instructional principle or a research approach.

In recent years, there has been a growing research interest in employing an ecological perspective in technology-based writing (e.g., Wang, 2019), collaborative writing (e.g., Vorobel & Kim, 2017), and learner engagement with instructors' written corrective feedback (e.g., Han & Hyland, 2019). Wang's (2019) study, for example, examined the effect of using WeChat, a popular social networking smartphone application, on the identity and literacy practices among Chinese EAL learners who take first-year writing classes. The findings showed that shuttling across formal, informal, and digital spaces mediated by semiotic resources has a crucial impact on the development of academic writing of transnational students. Through an ecological perspective, Vorobel and Kim (2017) examined in detail how four adolescent L2 writers perceived and took action in collaborative writing practices in face-to-face and online contexts. In their multiple-case study, they focus on addressing how adolescent ELL writers perceive and develop their L2 writing in various contexts, including face-to-face and online environments. As Vorobel and Kim explain, when language learners

attentively perceive contextual opportunities and resources and progressively increase critical awareness of the social and political aspect of language learning, they can act accordingly and interact with each other effectively. In addition, during the process of perceiving environmental affordances, it is important that the L2 writer take initiative and be an active agent. Echoing this theoretical position, the authors state that “the ecological perspective...allowed us to see ELLs as agents who took advantage of collaborative literacy practices and provided relational and semiotic resources for each other...” (p. 87).

Furthermore, the authors captured the dynamism of L2 writers’ perceptions, interactions, and collaborations in writing processes across two contexts, rather than regarding them as static and isolated products of opinion and action. This is the essence of an ecological perspective: regarding language learning as holistic, situated, and dialogical within the interrelatedness of the whole environment.

Sociocultural theories are employed to understand the perceptions and writing practices among EAL writers. For example, Morton et al. (2015) explored the perceptions of three multilingual students on the challenges of academic writing in their first year of disciplinary studies in an Australian university. Adopting a longitudinal case study method, the authors unpacked social and discipline-related factors that impacted students’ negotiation of written assignments and found multilingual students had multiple resources to improve their writing practices within and beyond formal academic environments. Drawing on Activity Theory, Lei (2016) found skilled and unskilled writers were greatly different in the process of utilizing mediated resources. This study also pointed out, no matter what writing strategies or resources are being used, the essence is to “help learners to notice language usage, to persistently imitate good writers’ language usages, and to integrate learning-to-write to writing-to-learn” (p. 114). In this sense, a sociocultural perspective, especially an ecological view, is valuable in exploring the interrelatedness between language learners and

their environments, which moves understanding beyond cognitive approaches on academic writing.

Given the primary theoretical framework employed in this study is an ecological perspective on language acquisition, language socialization as a theoretical framework was briefly reviewed in this section, which helps deepen the understanding of the writing trajectories of EAL learners within a higher education context. A strand of language socialization research has examined academic writing experiences and trajectories among L2 students in graduate and undergraduate-level contexts from a language socialization perspective (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Godfrey, 2015; Haggerty, 2019; Okuda & Anderson, 2018, Zappa-Hollman, 2007). Focusing on six multilingual exchange students from Mexico, Zappa-Hollman's (2007) multiple-case study reported that the participants struggled in meeting academic writing expectations, such as the required format and length, writing with a voice, and unfamiliar instructors' feedback. However, the findings also indicated that students gained a sense of agency in their socialization practices by their enhanced awareness and access to a new academic community. A recent study by Haggerty (2019) investigated six EAL writers' perceptions and practices on their academic writing challenges and opportunities in a newly established academic program at a Canadian university. In addition to reporting that students made a relatively smooth transition into their mainstream studies, this study also revealed learners' confusion and frustration in meeting academic writing expectations, and examined the issue of agency and identity in the process of academic discourse socialization. In a similar site of an undergraduate first year composition course, Godfrey's (2015) multiple-case study reported EAL learners' challenges in their academic socialization experiences, such as how they interacted and responded to their feedback on written assignments. By utilizing ethnographic oriented academic discourse socialization (ADS), Godfrey's findings highlighted the role of FYC as a site of academic socialization,

especially how the instructor can offer EAL learners' favourable access to unfamiliar academic discourse and make explicit the academic expectations and practices.

At the graduate level, LS researchers have reported both successes and challenges of EAL writers. Anderson's (2017) longitudinal case study investigated seven Chinese PhD students by uncovering the internal and external sources impacting their academic socialization and highlighted the necessity of recognizing students' challenges and providing them academic support, such as explicit academic expectations. Focusing similarly on the socialization process of TESOL graduate students in Canada, Kim (2015) reported that TESOL educators should fully recognize the diverse needs, expectations, and ideologies of non-native speakers of English amid the growing presence of international students in Canadian universities. These studies provide insights on both challenges and achievements of EAL students in a higher education context and their academic socialization practices by drawing on a LS perspective and framework.

2.2 Chinese International Students' Experiences in Canadian Universities

Given the global trend and impact of the internationalization of higher education, there is an increasing presence of international students who are studying in colleges and universities in Canada, especially those coming from China. Research attention, therefore, has been directed to report the academic and social experiences of these diverse populations. Some studies have focused particularly on challenges students met, impacting factors and outcomes of students' less positive experiences (e.g., Hu, 2010; Li, 2004; Liu, 2016; Preston & Wang, 2017; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Zhang, 2011; Zhang & Zhou, 2010); whereas, few other studies pay attention to students' comprehensive experiences including both their struggles and successes, as well as their agency and dynamic changes (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Heng, 2018). Aligned with these studies and focusing on academic writing issues, this study

investigated Chinese EAL writers' experiences in their FYC courses guided by ecological and LS approaches.

The following section addresses three main aspects: (1) discussing the trends and impact of internationalization on Canadian post-secondary institutions and the influential presence of Chinese EAL students; (2) synthesizing the empirical scholarship related to the expectations, needs, and experiences of Chinese students in Canadian universities; (3) examining the negative portrayals and cultural stereotypes about Chinese EAL students.

2.2.1 The Impact and Trend of Internationalization on Higher Education

An exploration of the macro context of internationalization of higher education can help to contextualize our understanding of Chinese EAL learners' experiences through a holistic and interconnected perspective. While the concept of internationalization is regarded as a buzz word with different interpretations and rationales, a definition by Knight (2004) that has interpreted it as a process of integration of postsecondary education from international, national, and local dimensions has been widely recognized. With the global increase of international students enrolled in English-speaking countries such as the USA, Canada, UK, and Australia, internationalization has become a core strategy and priority of many higher education institutions of those countries who are dedicated to attracting more international students. As a major destination for international students, there has been a substantial increase of numbers in Canada (Anderson, 2020b). These globally mobile students present an attractive market for higher education institutions, especially since many developed countries, including Canada, have cut their government budgets or resources to public higher education due to a variety of causes, such as the global financial crisis (Guo & Guo, 2017). Thus, international students are considered as a key solution because their paid tuition is typically at a much higher rate than domestic students (Anderson, 2015; Su & Harrison, 2016). As such, the internationalization of Canadian higher education has shown continuing momentum.

In addition to boosting the economic revenue of the national and local economy, the recruitment of international students has a positive impact on other sociocultural and academic aspects at a national level in Canada. As national and institutional policy has promoted, they are considered as contributors to campus diversity, which is crucial for preparing graduates to be internationally knowledgeable and globally competent and for increasing the integration between international students and their domestic peers (Surtees, 2019). Benefiting from the policy, international students obtain the opportunity to improve their English proficiency, experience different educational styles, and gain disciplinary knowledge when studying in Canada. As well, domestic students benefit from international students' offering of new knowledge, perspectives, and other resources (Knight, 2004). In a general sense, the global and national picture of international students is positive and optimistic.

Despite the priority of Canada's federal policies and the accompanying institutional focus on internationalization in various Canadian universities, changing the institutional perspectives and practices in terms of curriculum and pedagogy to accommodate diversified learning needs is a complex endeavour. Situating Canadian higher education in recent global trends, a recent study by Anderson (2020a) has shown that there are unsolved dilemmas posing challenges for Canadian universities since the accommodation of international students is insufficiently managed and relatively slower compared to the increase and influx of their presence. From the international students' perspective, Guo and Guo (2017) reported an issue of discrepancy between what internationalization policies advocated and students' actual experiences in the classroom. To be specific, despite universities broadly advocating for the enrichment of teaching and learning resources for international students, students indicated they encounter challenges following the course curriculum and, in their words, "there were few teaching and learning resources that were related to their experience" (p.

859). Especially, students reported feeling upset when their home countries were portrayed as “backward” or violent in learning materials. Similarly, Surtees’ (2019) study notes a tension brought by the trend of internationalization on Canadian campuses in addition to its benefits. According to Surtees’, on one hand, students may benefit from the opportunities of campus diversity; on the other hand, segregation along linguistic and ethnic lines was also often created. The creation of such segregation is both external and internal. In addition to some unfavourable external factors, EAL learners’ individual factors such as unwillingness to communicate, or resistance to be enculturated may also intensify their segregation. On a broader scope, Su and Harrison’s (2016) research about Chinese international students’ experiences in the universities of six English-speaking countries found a mismatch of information between what representative organizations employed by the host institutions provided and what Chinese students and their parents actually received. This often led to negative and dissatisfying study experiences after students enrolled in their disciplinary learning since these private organizations which employed by the university “deliberately hide critical information” (p. 911). Nevertheless, these empirical studies indicate that the mere increase of the presence of international students does not lead to effective interaction and mutual understanding between local students and the international ones in the local classroom and campus, as ideally envisioned as a policy goal for the internationalization of Canadian higher education. Therefore, it is important for researchers and educators to understand EAL students’ actual classroom learning experiences in situated local contexts.

2.2.2 Experiences of Chinese International Students in Canadian Universities

In recent years, Canadian universities and colleges experienced rapid growth of international students, especially from China, which has fueled the country’s economic growth. Compared to the U.S., which hosts the largest percentage of Chinese international students, Canadian education is perceived as a good optional choice for providing a high

quality of education with lower tuition and a safe environment (Ge et al., 2019). Overall, Chinese students account for one-third of all international students in Canada and their numbers are increasing steadily (Statistics Canada, 2019). Due to their influential presence with large enrolments, it is understandable that Chinese international students have experiences of both success and failure when studying abroad. Attention has therefore been directed toward their academic and social experiences, especially their encountered challenges.

Prior literature has shown Chinese EAL students have mainly encountered language difficulties, academic, and social challenges (Ge et al., 2019; Yang, 2017; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Among various factors influencing students' academic studies in Canadian higher institutions, English proficiency is the most frequently cited factor with which most Chinese EAL learners struggle. For example, Zhang and Zhou's (2010) study involving 76 international Chinese graduate and undergraduate students reported that participants had difficulties adjusting to their new learning. In addition to emphasizing that English fluency was the most impactful factor, this study indicated that students who graduated from international (English-medium) high schools still felt challenged to interact with instructors and peers in both oral and written methods of academic communication, especially with academic writing. Comparable issues are also noted in Zhang's (2011) study with 10 international graduate Chinese students at a Canadian university. Participants identified challenges related to technical writing, especially in terms of "idiomatic ways of expression, word choice, sentence structures and grammar" (p. 45). In a real sense, linguistic capabilities serve as the common thread which embedded in other influencing factors.

In addition to a lack of English language proficiency, research indicates Chinese international students also encounter challenges in their academic studies resulting from interwoven factors of educational and cultural differences between their home country and

Canada (Huang & Klinger; 2006; Liu, 2016; Wu, 2015; Yang, 2017). Due to cultural and educational differences, a study by Liu (2016) found Chinese EAL learners who are trained to have gained knowledge mainly by memorization and repetition in their high school context may face difficulties adapting to the style of independent learning, small-group discussion, and critical thinking in the western educational system. Focusing on the academic challenges and coping strategies of Chinese EAL students in a Canadian university, Huang and Klinger (2006) found the main differences between North American and Chinese classroom environments included classroom format, roles of instructors, and course expectations. In this study, Chinese students reported that the western style of instruction was featured with an informal and flexible manner of learning, in which instructors seemed to play a “diminished role” (p. 55), and students are encouraged to be active and critical. In contrast, what they had previously received is more formal, lecture-based teaching in which teachers play a main role. These empirical studies provide insights into the experiences and trajectories, as well as impacting factors that cause the difficulties and challenges that students encounter. Those educational and cultural differences between students’ home and host countries not only pose challenges but can also create confusion, anxiety, and depression among Chinese EAL students (Preston & Wang, 2017; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Thus, these prior studies that focused on Chinese international students in a Canadian context provide insights into their struggles, needs, and expectations in navigating their academic studies, as well as impacting factors that caused their struggles. Although informative, it appears some studies tend to treat Chinese EAL learners as a homogeneous group and, in turn, overemphasize EAL learners’ perceived deficits (and differences), as well as how these deficits can negatively impact their academic success.

2.2.3 Cultural Stereotypes and Negative Labelling of Chinese International Students

Stereotypes are personally held impressions and perceptions toward a certain group of people. Typically, stereotypes about certain cultural groups contain both positive and negative traits (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). The existing studies that related to Asian learners (especially Chinese learners) often portray them as obedient to authority, that they lack critical thinking skills, and tend to keep silent in classroom interactions, in addition to perceiving them as “model minorities”: hard-working, good at math, or studious (Guo & Guo, 2017; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Yang, 2017). Regarding Chinese students, particularly, those negative images also include poor English skills, being passive and dependent, and clinging to their cultural homogeneous groups (Heng, 2018; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018; Wu, 2015). According to Ruble and Zhang (2013), American domestic students and instructors tend to attribute Chinese international students’ non-participation in class discussions to their bad English or being unsocial. Concerning the issue of reticence, Zhu and Bresnahan (2018) suggested Chinese students were labelled as culturally isolated and reticent, which led to negative evaluations from American domestic peers. Such negative perceptions may be detrimental to Chinese international students’ adaptation process in studying abroad and could negatively impact their ability to socialize into their target academic settings and discourses.

In the Canadian context, prompted by the trend of internationalization and changing demographics on campuses, international students have also become the focus of Canadian media with a variety of representations. As an illustration, Anderson (2019) found that international students are more represented as “dehumanized commodities,” even as a “foreign threat” (p. 19), and this was often directed specifically towards Asian or Chinese students in media reports, although their role in contributing to the economy and campus diversity was also recognized. The contradictory representation of international students,

especially Asian and Chinese students in Canadian media and academic communities, therefore requires critical reflection and reframing of those students in situated local contexts.

It is worth noting that the negative portrayals and cultural stereotypes about Chinese international students have been problematized and debunked (e.g., Heng, 2018; Wu, 2015; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018). As an example, Heng (2018) challenged the cultural stereotypes of Chinese international students in a US college and argued that “difference is not deficit” (p. 22). Following 18 mainland Chinese undergraduates, Heng examined their challenges and highlighted the positive changes that these EAL students experienced by enacting learner agency during the course of an academic year. By drawing on a “hybridized sociocultural framework” (p. 24), Heng pointed out that the nature of many identified challenges is temporary since learners can exercise their agency, which plays a key role in turning academic tensions into opportunities. In this sense, it is important to contextually understand EAL learners’ experiences by acknowledging their challenges, needs, changes, as well as learner agency in their learning journey. The empirical studies, therefore, provide insights for investigating the experiences of international Chinese students without stigmatized stereotypes.

2.3 EAL Writers in First-Year Composition (FYC) Context

This section focuses on a narrowed curricular and institutional setting for current research on EAL students: EAL writers in the first-year composition courses. As Matsuda et al. (2006) point out, FYC serves as a site that provides opportunities for students to negotiate their academic and social situations through writing, and persists as a “gateway for the vast majority of students to higher-level work in most academic disciplines” (p. 3). In the context of FYC courses, EAL learners usually encountered challenges in their composition studies (Godfrey, 2015; Leki, 2007; Matsuda et al., 2006). The commonly discussed issues related to EAL learners range from placement options, pedagogical approaches, students’ language and

literacy development, and instructors' preparation (CCCC Statement, 2001, 2020). In a Canadian context, FYC, which has a clear focus on academic and technical writing, has its unique properties and has undergone changes in accommodating EAL learners (Stouck, 2019). Accordingly, increased research attention and pedagogical innovation are involved in capturing the dynamic changes in the local context. Addressing this, the following section discusses: (1) historical accounts on EAL Writers in L2 Writing and L1 Composition studies; (2) scholarship on academic writing issues of EAL writers at the undergraduate level; (3) unique features of FYC courses in the Canadian context, and; (4) a gap in the research that this current study addresses.

2.3.1 Historical Accounts on EAL Writers in L2 Writing and L1 Composition

In order to understand the current issues regarding EAL writers in first-year composition courses, it is beneficial to consider how L2 writing relates to composition writing studies from a historical perspective. The historical accounts on L2 writing have shown that it originally borrowed the theories and pedagogies from L1 composition scholarship. Gradually, L2 writing has developed as a detached field and focused on issues related to L2 writers in various contexts. From a historical perspective, Matsuda (2003) indicated that L2 writing was not a subfield of L1 composition studies, although the L2 field took guidance from the theoretical framework and instructional methods in L1 composition. L2 specialists and scholars have actively attempted to move beyond the research paradigms of L1 composition by focusing on the unique needs and challenges of L2 writers and related issues. Along with the gradual establishment of L2 writing as an independent field at the end of the last century, a disciplinary division between composition studies and L2 writing was established. As Matsuda (2003) indicates, L2 writing issues have gradually become absent from L1 writing studies with the flourishing of ESL programs in L2 studies. Accordingly, L1 compositionists began losing interest in addressing the issues related to L2 writers, leaving it

to L2 specialists and programs, which usually served a remedial role to fix grammar mistakes or to improve language proficiency.

However, the creation of a “division of labour” between L1 and L2 composition studies has proven problematic. From the L1 composition studies perspective, even though addressing the needs of L2 writers may not be among their research and instructional priorities, classroom instructors in higher education are continually challenged by the increasing number of students coming from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In mainstream first-year composition courses, instructors who are used to teaching NES might feel unprepared to work with L2 writers with diverse linguistic, educational, and cultural backgrounds and learning needs. Viewed from the perspective of L2 writing studies, although EAL specialists and instructors pay close attention to EAL students across different settings in higher education, the primary efforts are targeted at ESL or EAP contexts. Also, L2 specialists, instructors, or researchers might find it challenging to connect to L1 compositionists and instructors across disciplines through dialogue and cooperation to support the writing needs of EAL learners (Matsuda, 2003). The absence of voices between the two fields can also be felt by EAL or L2 students when they transfer from typical L2 writing courses in ESL programs to first-year composition courses as university students. Since the two programs are usually administered by different departments with different sets of objectives and teaching practices, students who are used to L2 contexts may feel surprised and find it hard to adapt to mainstream classes, and may feel relatively disadvantaged compared to NES peers as a result. The disconnection between L1 composition studies and L2 writing has been established with a division of research and pedagogical priorities.

As more EAL learners have increasingly enrolled in mainstream composition courses in North America, especially in the U.S., it has become of paramount importance for composition faculty both in L1 and L2 writing to understand students’ needs and challenges

to support them better. Many L2 scholars and specialists have recognized the difference and difficulties of EAL learners who take composition courses together with L1 peers. For example, an early study by Silva (1993) noted that the writing practices of L1 and L2 students are “rhetorically, linguistically and strategically” different and there is a need to look particularly into L2 writers’ needs in mainstream courses. Encouragingly, in the last decade, L1 composition studies have also begun to acknowledge the presence and needs of L2 writers. In response to the increased number of L2 students on campus across North America and echoing Silva’s call for research inquiries, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the world’s largest professional organization for researching and teaching composition, published the “CCCC statement on Second-language Writing and Writers” in 2001. The Statement urged writing specialists, especially L1 compositionists, “to recognize and take responsibility for the regular presence of second language writers in writing classes, understand their characteristics, and develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs” (2001, p. 1). This statement has been regarded as the formal recognition of L2 writers as part of mainstream composition classes in the U.S. In addition to reminding compositionists of their responsibility to understand and meet the needs of increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse students, it also serves as the guideline for recognizing and supporting the needs of L2 and EAL writers in instruction and assessment.

As admirable as these calls to action are and the positive recognition of the presence of L2 or EAL learners in composition classrooms, the scholarship in composition studies still shows a slow response to students’ needs and inclusion of those needs in mainstream writing courses, compared to the close attention and research inquiry of L2 or EAL writers in the research field of L2 writing. Although some mainstream composition teachers recognize the presence of L2 writers, attending to their unique needs might not be guaranteed due to limited

expertise and resources. Moreover, some conscientious instructors perceive that writing issues relating to language capacities should be taken care of by EAL specialists or remedial writing programs (Ferris et al., 2011). In summary, while the acknowledgment and awareness of L2 writers' unique writing needs and challenges in L1 writing contexts have been strengthened in recent years, more research is needed to examine the challenges that await L2 students in their undergraduate composition courses in specific institutional settings.

2.3.2 Scholarship on Academic Writing Issues of EAL Writers at the Undergraduate Level

Writing plays a prominent role in a student's academic career. It could even be considered the most critical skill, a tool for scholarly communication, study, and research (Hyland, 2013). It is also the medium of transmitting scholarship, such as writing a research proposal or publishing an article. Globally, because English broadly functions as the dominant language for academic communication and scholarship, writing efficiently and appropriately in English is extremely important, and it might pose significant challenges for students who use English as an additional language (Hyland, 2013). As Hyland (2013) has indicated "we are what we write" (p. 53), and students and researchers are defined and judged by how they write as academics. Furthermore, academic writing practices are basic forms of language socialization and may exclude L2 writers from academic success (Duff & Anderson, 2015). Since L2 writers are newcomers to the disciplinary conventions and rules in their target languages and academic settings, they may feel more challenged with new roles, identities, and ways of writing to conform in their disciplinary communities. In a word, writing plays a central role for L2 writers in navigating their academic studies and poses great challenges for them.

In response to the diversified needs of EAL writers, a wealth of research attention draws on placement issues and how to treat EAL students ethically in mainstream

composition environments (e.g., Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010; Silva, 1993; Tardy & Whittig, 2017). Silva (1993) first drew attention to issues surrounding placement and identified four options for L2 writers: mainstreaming, basic writing, ESL writing, and cross-cultural composition courses. The “mainstream” option, also described as the “sink or swim” approach, might put administrators at ease but can leave L2 writers to suffer through the loss of confidence and academic failure due to their unattended special features and needs (Silva, 1993). Despite its problematic nature, the mainstream approach remains the dominant and prevalent one in North America.

Given the dynamic globalized changes with respect to student mobility, and the resulting situation of more diverse groups of EAL learners, Tardy and Whittig (2017) have updated the discussion on the ethical treatment of EAL writers. Aligned with Silva and other L2 scholars’ ideas on treating EAL writers with respect and understanding, Tardy and Whittig further elaborated that composition practitioners should raise awareness of the challenges that EAL writers might encounter in local contexts, take full consideration of EAL writers’ multiple languages and cultures, and encourage them to exert learner agency. In recent years, the traditional paradigm of first-year composition courses has been challenged by both compositionists and L2 scholars for many reasons, such as disconnection from the core disciplines, and limitation of status quo arrangement for including L2 writers (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010). These challenges and doubts may also trigger positive innovation opportunities, more research efforts, and institutional changes to create appropriate EAL writers’ environments.

In addition to the placement issues, scholarship on EAL writers in undergraduate studies focus on the writing needs and challenges they encountered, coping strategies they employed in navigating their writing trajectories, as well as impacting factors for their overall experiences. In an early study by Spack (1997), the participant from Japan found her first

year studying in a U.S. university was challenging because she had to align herself with the American style of study, which was quite different from her previous experiences in Japan. Despite all her struggles, the participant made a relatively smooth transition because of strategic adaptations, such as improving reading strategies. With similar research attention on EAL learners' transitional experiences in English-medium universities and concern for their academic literacy through writing at this stage, Leki (2007) conducted a multiple-case study involving four EAL writers (two cases of Chinese students) regarding their writing trajectories in language programs and the impact on their development of academic literacy in disciplinary courses. Her longitudinal research discovered that the participants' learning experiences were impacted by their lack of engagement in language courses and factors of language ideology and power relations in their new socioeconomic contexts. In a similar vein, a study conducted by Lee (2018) involving eight Chinese undergraduate students who failed their writing class, pointed out that both students and teachers share the responsibility due to a lack of effective communication of the students' writing needs, challenges, and writing expectations between the two sides. The author also indicated it is worthwhile to study students' failure and success in navigating academic writing.

Empirical research efforts also explored writing trajectories of EAL students by comparing them to L1 students, with some studies focused mainly on Chinese EAL learners (e.g., Eckstein & Ferris, 2018; Siczek, 2014; Stuart, 2012). By comparing L2 and L1 writers in the context of FYC courses, Stuart (2012) focused on uncovering the challenges and changes that L2 students' experienced. Comparatively, the focal group of L2 students were found to experience a more transformative sense of learning in overcoming the uncertainties and gaining confidence during the interactions with instructors and peers within social and academic contexts. In framing the study in Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction and a paradigm of CoP (community of practice), the author considered L2 writers as social agents,

the FYC classes as academic communities, and the written texts they produced as the product of reading and processing previous texts. The employed conceptual framework and paradigms of interrelated theories successfully captured the dynamics of L2 writers' experiences reflected and shaped by the site of FYC and fit well into the landscape of L2 writing scholarship. By directly comparing the texts produced by L1 and L2 writers and their self-perceptions in a mixed FYC context, Eckstein and Ferris's (2018) study shows that the observed and self-perceived language needs of L2 writers, including "linguistic accuracy, lexical diversity, and language-related anxiety" (p. 137), are significantly different from their L1 counterparts who obtained higher scores measuring the effectiveness of language uses despite the commonalities between the two groups. In their study, L2 writers at advanced proficiency with lexical complexity and syntactic sophistication were observed having many surface errors and struggling with self-confidence. This finding reveals the specialties and demanding needs of L2 writers and the complexities of L2 written texts. It provides insights for composition instructors on better supporting EAL learners in L1/EAL mixed contexts.

Research also found EAL writers face specific challenges in some types of academic writing, such as source-based writing. A study by Kwon et al. (2018) focuses on first-year undergraduate L2 writers' (mostly L1 Chinese) use of reporting verbs in their source-based writing assignments and found participants' both successful and unsuccessful attempts and frequency of using across word forms in source-based writing, which is an essential academic genre for FYC studies. Their study called for pedagogical attention on including a variety of academic words for reporting sources and teaching L2 writers to understand different rhetorical functions and the impact of these functions in evidence-based writing. With a specific aim to examine the challenges of L2 writers for source-based writing, Neumann et al. (2019) constructed a corpus consisting of students' written assignments in two EAP programs at a Canadian university. The findings indicated that L2 writers face challenges in profoundly

understanding the sources and integrating the details appropriately to support their writing, which offers insights for pedagogical approaches for scaffolding this crucial skill among L2 writers.

With specific research attention on the Chinese international students in their mainstream composition courses ENGL 106 and their writing lab at Purdue University, Atilgan (2014) conducted a needs analysis of their rhetorical, linguistic, and strategic writing needs from both Chinese students' and their instructors' perspectives. The author employed a mixed-methods approach to research design including surveys and interviews with Chinese ENGL 106 students and tutors, aligned with error and rhetorical analysis of students' written samples. The findings revealed that both Chinese students and their tutors agreed on the factors including lack of language proficiency (e.g., word choice, verb tense, subject-verb agreement), and lack of writing skills and strategies (e.g., self-editing), but were divergent in their priorities relating to specific areas of linguistic needs. Nevertheless, although numerous studies have examined the academic language needs of EAL learners, and some have focused exclusively on academic writing, the ongoing nature and important role played by needs analysis warrant further studies.

Compared to much research attention on reporting EAL writers' challenges through various methods, few studies also explored how different EAL learners negotiate their writing trajectories in response to the difficulties they encountered. The coping strategies that learners develop from their learning experiences help them overcome their writing difficulties, complete writing tasks and articulate their real writing needs (Guo, 2012; Lei, 2016; Leki, 2007). Focusing on the strategies that L2 writers employ to respond to various social, academic contexts, some L2 scholars, such as Leki (2007), have categorized a set of coping strategies from cognitive and sociocultural dimensions, which include relying on past experiences, making use of their first language, looking for models, and accommodating

instructors' requirements among others. Focusing on refugee EAL students in their first-year composition studies, Hirano (2014) found that students could draw on resources including writing tutors and peer support to deal with their academic writing in a highly supportive environment. Similarly, the Chinese EAL undergraduate students in the study by Yang et al. (2006) were found to be using peer review and instructors' feedback to improve their writing practices. Based on previously identified coping strategies, Guo (2012) investigated Chinese EAL students' perceptions and strategies of academic writing practices in a Canadian university and identified five types of strategies employed by participants, including sociocultural strategies, adapting strategies, applying (previous learning experiences) strategies, individualized strategies, and self-improvement strategies. These studies offer L2 and composition instructors a better understanding of EAL students writing challenges and employed strategies.

In addition to investigating students' perceptions and writing practices, a growing number of researchers have begun to examine whether instructors in composition classes and across various disciplines are aware of the presence of EAL learners and their challenges for writing and whether they strive to address those needs (e.g., Marshall & Walsh Marr, 2018; Matsuda et al., 2013). For instance, Ferris et al. (2011) examined the instructional philosophies and teaching practices of writing instructors in response to L2 writers' needs and challenges through surveys and interviews. These instructors were shown to be either unaware of the L2 writers or regarded students' background knowledge in their L1 as irrelevant. Thus, the authors called for "more comprehensive and detailed preparation of all writing instructors who work with L2 students, whether they teach designated L2 writing courses or mainstream composition courses" (p. 225). Based on this study, Matsuda et al. (2013) continued to investigate how writing instructors in the first-year composition program perceive the presence and needs of L2 writers. The perception surveys conducted with both

mainstream and L2 sectors of writing classrooms showed no special provision addressing the presence and needs of L2 writers, although the classroom instructors had recognized and even worked with this student group by providing them pedagogical support.

With similar concern, a recent study by Marshall and Walsh Marr (2018) involving eight instructors in a writing-intensive course at a Canadian university highlighted the dilemmas and challenges that instructors have encountered in responding to many EAL students' needs. The result of the study found that instructors not only faced instructional dilemmas in balancing the needs of EAL and native English-speaking learners but also felt their professional identity was being challenged, with several participants indicating "I am not here for teaching them writing" (p. 39). In addition, the authors pointed out that EAL students were disadvantaged and benefited less from the course combining writing and disciplinary contents due to their lack of academic literacy. Accordingly, the instructors were challenged to meet students' needs for learning to write. Thus, the authors called for more institutional support and opportunity for teachers to be trained in working with multilingual students. Therefore, the above studies conducted in North American context have shown that instructors' awareness of L2 students' needs has gradually increased but still face their own challenges and limitations for better serving those learners in the classroom situations.

2.3.3 Features of First-Year Canadian Composition Courses

Compared to the literature targeted towards freshman composition in U.S. higher education settings, little scholarly work addresses features of first-year composition courses in Canada. In higher education in the U.S., first-year writing courses have been described as ubiquitous and generic, and called the "most required, most taught, and the most taken course" (Fleming, 2011, p. 1) since it was first offered at Harvard almost 150 years ago. Given the history of FYC courses in the U.S., there are various composition programs and a unified research site for composition theories and teacher training. Unlike the situation in the

U.S., writing studies in Canada have been identified by their distinct features. As Brooks (2002) notes, “the nature of the first-year English curriculum in Canada is significantly different than the typical composition requirement in American colleges and universities” (p. 673). The main characteristics of Canadian writing studies can be summarized as follows.

First, writing and literature are closely linked historically in Canadian universities and colleges. The history of first-year writing courses in Canadian postsecondary can be traced back to a first-year literature course or literature/composition hybrid, traditionally associated with English Departments in much of the twentieth century. The literature-based approach aims not at teaching writing directly but at imparting cultural knowledge and value by cultivating a taste of good reading and aesthetics. Nevertheless, such histories significantly impact instructional approaches but have been subject to gradual changes in recent decades.

Second, writing instruction in the Canadian context occurs in diverse disciplinary and institutional settings. As notably described by Smith (2006), it is “carried out in a variety of disciplinary settings outside of first-year English courses, and indeed often outside of English departments” (p. 2). The decentralized and interdisciplinary nature of Canadian writing instruction and studies also differ from the freshman composition models in the U.S. Such multiple settings for writing instruction have both advantages and disadvantages. On the negative side, according to Brooks (2002) and Smith (2006), the lack of a united disciplinary context for composition studies and scholarship creates difficulties for compositionists to establish writing programs and courses with smooth communication and consistent effort. On the positive side, paradoxically, such a “lack of a center” also creates opportunities for more branches of writing instruction and cooperation to flourish across disciplines with fresh ideas and innovations. Therefore, the unique features of Canadian writing studies create both barriers and opportunities for innovations in composition instruction and research.

Third, in terms of the pedagogical approaches, Canadian writing scholarship has a clear focus on academic and technical writing over popular writing forms (Stouck, 2019; Strachan, 2008). A genre-based approach starts by helping students familiarize themselves with the norms and expectations of writers in different disciplines, rather than prescribing a standardized principle of good writing (Stouck, 2019). Genre theories draw students' attention to the patterns of different situations and examine how to produce texts associated with cultural and social values, specified with disciplines. Strachan (2008) summarized that the Canadian approach to genre theory had been proven to be productive, successful, and unique.

In addition to these three distinctive features, and whether to borrow or imitate the patterns and models of American first-year writing courses, there are still debates and inconsistencies among composition scholars, given the Canadian situation. In fact, opposition to the U.S. model of freshman composition is a unique quality of the Canadian context (Landry, 2016) and significant changes have taken place along with the changing landscape of higher education in Canada. With the rapid increase of students who do not speak English as their first language, many universities have taken active initiatives for institutional and disciplinary innovations. Taking the University of Alberta (in Canada) as an illustration, Smith (2006), later noted by Graves and Graves (2012), documented the institutional challenges and openness for improvement to writing instruction, especially for serving L2 or EAL learners. According to their historical snapshots and analysis, there were no credit composition courses offered separately to undergraduate ESL writers to address their writing needs from 1995 to 2005. Those students who struggled with academic writing were referred to fee-based remedial non-credit writing courses outside the classroom. Since 2005, the marginal status of first-year writing instruction and lack of support for EAL learners has been strengthened and improved through a joint-effort task force at the University of Alberta,

including examining the needs of L2 writers and the establishment of a full-time writer center offering one-on-one tutoring and workshops (Graves & Graves, 2012). Although the case of Alberta may not be representative of other Canadian universities, the trend of paying more attention to first-year writing instruction and innovation has been identified.

2.3.4 A Gap in Research: Exploring the Writing Challenges and Resources of Chinese EAL students in FYC Context in Canada from a Holistic Perspective

While the existing literature on the academic writing experiences of EAL students is informative and insightful, some gaps can be identified. First, although growing research attention has been paid to investigating the challenges that EAL learners encounter in mainstream composition or content courses and how they navigate various resources to meet the required writing expectations, few accounts have investigated the complexities of the targeted issue from an ecological perspective to language learning in the field of academic writing or L2 writing. Aligned with the sociocultural oriented theories in SLA, an ecological view to language learning emphasizes the relationship between perceptions and actions of agents, with the critical notions of affordance and learner agency the conceptual tools. That means language learning happens when learners perceive the affordances in the learning environment and act upon them. Also, taking an ecological perspective to language learning, as van Lier (2008b) clarified, is “situated in today’s complex world of the multimodal, multi-sensory and multicultural learner” (p. 63). For instance, many EAL writers bring to their studies not only diverse historical, sociocultural, and educational experiences but also their rich use of various techniques such as digital resources for their writing. Ecological and LS approaches are inclusive for exploring the potential challenges and emerging resources for EAL writers by exploring the interconnections between individual learners and their environment and capturing their dynamic enculturation process.

Second, although previous studies reporting on EAL learners' writing challenges are informative and insightful, some tend to frame EAL students' experiences in mostly deficit terms based on negative assumptions and generalizing stereotypes. For instance, Chinese EAL students are often portrayed as passive learners with poor English, less engagement, and uncritical thinking (Heng, 2018). As the largest group of international students, the nuanced and individualized experiences of Chinese EAL learners studying abroad can be further understood, supported, and thoughtfully managed. By debunking the existing deficit model toward viewing EAL students, this study intends to explore the writing challenges and resources of EAL students in a Canadian FYC context by acknowledging the contextual impact and students' learning agency rather than framing stereotypes of them statically and fixedly.

Third, the first-year composition in the Canadian context has recently changed with innovations (Landry, 2016; Stouck, 2019). Compared to scholarship which is based on the U.S. context, there are currently a few educational resources and research efforts dedicated explicitly to addressing composition writing from a Canadian perspective. With specific regard to EAL writers, there is also little research attention focused on how these groups of learners navigate their writing trajectories and make progress by targeting first-year composition courses as a research site. As explored above, the reasons could be traced to its historical roots in literature, interdisciplinary nature of instruction, and a clear focus on academic and technical writing. Such discrepancy and diversity, along with the increasing presence of EAL learners in mainstream classrooms, also bring more research insights on the investigated issue.

Therefore, in the broader context of internationalization of higher education, acknowledging the increased presence of EAL learners and their challenges in language proficiencies is not enough to provide the appropriate support. With specific regard to

academic writing, an investigation of EAL writers' trajectories rather than an exclusive focus on their encountered challenges can provide insights on how to support them better as they expect in a situated context. Furthermore, situated within the site of first-year composition studies and research in Canada, an examination of EAL writers' individualized perceptions and practices can provide a glimpse into their real-life experiences, including both their perceived writing challenges and needs, their efforts and progress during the process of interacting and engaging with various resources in their learning context.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological approach adopted in the current study. It presents a brief discussion of the research design of this present study: a multiple-case study including the description of research context and participant selection, data collection tools and procedures, as well as the use of thematic analysis for data analysis. I also address the issue of ethical consideration and the trustworthiness of the study.

3.1 Research Design

Previous research has shown that both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used to describe, explore, and explain the issues relating to the writing experiences of EAL writers in the context of English medium colleges and universities (e.g., Atilgan, 2014; Godfrey, 2015; Stuart, 2012). The rationale for choosing a case study methodology for this study is identified as the following: first, a qualitative case study is distinctive in understanding complex social phenomena that can not be easily separated from its contexts (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). Characterized as being “particularistic, descriptive and heuristic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29), a case study allows for empirical inquiry into current phenomena in the given context of a real-world situation. Second, while defined and classified differently by researchers, case studies in the field of education and language learning and teaching allow the inclusion of both participants’ (emic) perspectives and researcher’s (etic) interpretation and are appropriate for focusing on the attitudes, emotions, activities of a small group of individuals within a bounded and integrated system. Third, a case study provides the benefit of consulting with multiple sources and approaches for data collection, analysis, and triangulation (Duff, 2014; Yin, 2018). In the field of applied linguistics, case study stands out for its methodological traits and has gradually gained in popularity as a research method (Duff, 2014). Fourth, with regards to its function, case study plays a vital role in extending the knowledge base, gaining new insights and perspectives, and

attracting attention for new programs or policies for language learning and use (Duff, 2014; van Lier, 2008b). Therefore, case study as a distinctive form of empirical inquiry is a valuable design to examine participants' activities comprehensively within their natural context and holistically capture various perspectives through the use of complementary methods for data collection and analysis, as elaborated in the subsequent sections.

My decision to select multiple cases rather than a single case was based on the consideration to provide several related instances of the investigated phenomenon. Additionally, the multiple-case study approach allows researchers to draw on multiple data sources and involves multiple perspectives of two or more groups (Duff & Anderson, 2015; Yin, 2018). As Duff and Anderson (2015) pointed out, the similarities, differences, or even conflicts of multiple perspectives may reveal potential disparities by within-case and cross-case analysis, thereby benefiting from a multiple-case study design. The overall aim of the present study is to examine the evolving perceptions and performance of six Chinese EAL writers, especially their encountered challenges and needs, and strategies or resources that they employed in the setting of their first-year writing course COMP 100 in a Canadian university. The following section presents the research setting and recruitment of participants, data collection, and analysis used in this multiple case study.

3.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted at a medium-sized comprehensive university in western Canada, referred to pseudonymously as Grand Bay University (GBU). In the academic year of 2017 to 2018, approximately 2,400 of the university's 18,000 undergraduates were international students. Among them, Chinese EAL students rank at the top, with over a thousand students enrolled (Citation redacted for anonymity). According to the minimum admission requirements for international students coming from the People's Republic of China (PRC), students are required to show grade results for Senior Years 1, 2, and 3 with a

minimum overall average of 85%, plus the National Chinese Entrance Examinations (*Gao Kao*) with an acceptable score or SAT/ACT results. International students who have not study at least four years within Canada should demonstrate their English proficiency either by passing official recognized tests, such as TOEFL or IELTS, or completing the language programs at the English Language Center at this Canadian university. Applicants to specific programs may be offered conditional admission if they meet all academic requirements but do not have sufficient language test scores for regular admission. These students are conditionally recruited with permission to register for degree courses after or alongside taking the language programs of various lengths, such as the Transitional or Sheltered Program.

The targeted course for this study is COMP 100 (pseudonym, as are all courses named in this study). It is the most chosen of the required courses that nearly every undergraduate takes in their first year. To provide context for understanding this course's place in the first-year writing programs and show how this course might be representative of typical first-year writing courses in Canadian post-secondary institutions, this section first describes the Academic Writing Essentials (AWE, pseudonym) program at GBU with an overview of the courses that the program required, in which COMP 100 is a core course. I then focused on the description of COMP 100 including the requirements and options specific for EAL students seeking to fulfill their AWE courses in their disciplines.

3.2.1 Academic Writing Essentials (AWE) and First-Year Writing Courses

The AWE program includes four standard first-year writing courses at GBU: COMP 100 (Academic Reading and Writing), COMP 101 (Literary Genres), COMP 102 (Literary Traditions), and COMP 110 (Engineering students only). All the matriculated undergraduate students must complete an AWE-designated course or two to fulfill their program requirements. The recommendation is to take the course early in degree studies to obtain a maximum benefit; however, students can take the course at any point in the program.

Students who need to improve their English proficiency may also benefit from registering in the preparatory courses before receiving credit for an AWE-designated course. As required by their major (which may vary across disciplines), students would typically take any two courses to fulfill the AWE.

Table 3.1

Lists of AWE-designated courses

Courses	Description	Number of Sections (Fall 2019)
COMP 100	Academic Reading and Writing	46
COMP 101	Literary Genres	15
COMP 102	Literary Traditions	8
COMP 110	Academic Communication (for Engineers)	4

As Table 3.1 shows above, the sections of COMP 100 far outnumbered other options in the AWE-designated courses. Despite the high numbers of writing sections available, however, students' given options are still limited in reality, especially if they have not been chosen or accepted into a specific discipline. Additionally, first-year students seeking to take an AWE-required course are not guaranteed a spot in one of these four courses. Despite these uncertainties, taking COMP 100 with approximately forty sections available each fall semester and with no prerequisites to other courses is the most common way for students in their first year to earn credits for an AWE-designated course.

According to the GBU Calendar, the academic writing requirement has the central theme of emphasizing essential skills, including strong academic reading, writing, and research academic success at the university level. Notably, the requirement stresses that, regardless of whether enrolled students are native speakers of English or EAL learners, all students need to develop these skills to meet the expectations of advanced literacy associated with university-level academic studies. Therefore, students are expected to develop their

fundamental skills in reading, writing, and research and prepare themselves for more advanced university-level courses by taking an AWE-designated course in their first year.

3.2.2 Target Course: COMP 100

The course COMP 100 investigated in this study is offered every semester throughout an academic year. As an essential course of the AWE program, COMP 100 aims to teach the practical skills needed for successful academic writing across a variety of subject areas. According to the description, this course aims at developing core transferable skills and critical thinking, reading, and writing needed for university courses. Also, by practicing academic tasks, such as summarizing academic articles or analyzing different genre features and writing a basic research paper, students are encouraged to learn different academic reading strategies, develop their critical thinking skills, and use writing as a means of learning. Students are also expected to learn that writing is an ongoing process by practicing peer review, drafting, revision, and reflection.

In addition to a final exam, the course assignments of COMP 100 include four elements: a summary, a genre analysis, rhetorical analysis, and a research paper. Upon entering their composition studies, students may also be required to complete a diagnostic essay that does not factor into the course mark. If the diagnostic work suggests students are not ready to succeed in COMP 100, instructors would usually recommend them to register in COMP 099 before attempting an AWE class. Students can decide whether to follow the instructors' suggestion or remain in the class. In COMP 100, students are expected to read and discuss various types of academic essays and craft arguments in terms of different academic genres and rhetorical features. In composing the research paper, students are given the option to choose the topic either from their individual interests, subject studies or from a list provided by the instructor. The course has a compulsory exit exam system. That means, without completing the final exam with a passing grade, they are not guaranteed course

credit. Individual sections of COMP 100 can be varied since individual instructors have options over texts, topics, and assignments. However, instructors who teach COMP 100 in the first two terms need to follow the template syllabus with the given options. It is worth noting that not all the participants took their composition courses guided by the standardized syllabus. To better serve learners' needs and revitalize the course, there were four pilot studies conducted among other sections of teaching in the Fall semester when the current study was carried out in 2019. One version of the pilot study is called scaffolded syllabus, which focuses on a research paper by dividing the task into several study blocks. In this version, students are encouraged to choose their topic early and revise their writing all the way through the course with instructors' scaffolded guidance. One of my six student participants was in this pilot study. By following through with her learning process, I have gained a deeper understanding of the new version and its influence on EAL learners.

EAL undergraduate students at GBU have the same requirements as L1 students concerning the completion of an AWE-designated course. In addition to that, EAL learners are provided with preparatory courses such as COMP 099 (Fundamentals of Academic Writing). By registering in this preparatory course, EAL learners could further improve their English proficiency and build a foundation for their academic writing and literacy. However, these courses do not satisfy the AWE requirements; that means, EAL students who take COMP 099 still need to take the AWE-designated courses to fulfill their program requirements. For this reason, some EAL students are unwilling to register in COMP 099 by dropping COMP 100, even though they are considered not quite ready for university-level academic writing by their instructors.

3.3 Recruitment of Student and Non-Student Participants

The recruitment of student participants for this study began in the academic semester in the Fall of 2019. Informed by instructions for recruiting participants for a qualitative study

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Duff, 2014; Yin, 2018), I employed purposive sampling for the current study. The ideal student participants for the study were Chinese EAL students in various disciplines who enrolled in the course COMP 100. They were also expected to come from mainland China and have no previous experience living and studying in an English-medium country.

Since there were 46 sections for the first-year academic reading and writing course COMP 100 in the Fall semester, I assumed that Chinese EAL students might scatter over different classes. Therefore, going to each classroom to recruit student participants directly was considered unrealistic and might interrupt the regular teaching and learning routines of each section. Thus, I gave up the intention to recruit participants directly from their classes but decided to try other options. I contacted the university organizations of international students' services and student clubs to distribute the recruitment poster (see Appendix A) for recruiting participants. I also visited the spots for club days, which were exhibited for newcomers at the beginning of every Fall or Spring semester. Luckily, I met two first-year students, MoMo and Emily (pseudonyms), at the International Student Club (ISC) booth. Both showed interest in my research topic and agreed to participate in the study. I also learned from the ISC director about various WeChat (a popular social media application among Chinese students) groups for Chinese international students who enrolled in different courses. Thanks to her invitation, I joined a COMP 100 group and posted a digital version of the recruitment poster with a QR (quick response) code in the group discussion with the group owner's support and agreement. There were altogether five students who responded to the digital poster and expressed their interest in being interviewed. By either email or WeChat, I connected with the five students individually to schedule the time to meet, and exchanged the study's necessary information. One participant naturally withdrew from the study since he decided to drop the course in the second week of study and register for COMP

100 in the next semester. Although not being a participant, he openly shared his reasons for withdrawing from the course since he felt too burdened by taking six courses in the first semester and voluntarily sent me his course syllabus of COMP 100 for my reference.

In all, I recruited six student participants for my study. Two participants, Young and Zoey, were transfer students from a prestigious university in China. Although they had studied at the same university, Young and Zoey differed in their language proficiency, which was shown by both their official IELTS scores and self-perceptions toward their language proficiencies. Another three participants including Emily, MoMo and Gu, graduated from international high schools in China. They had experience studying in either a U.S. or Canadian education model and have succeeded in language tests. Although all were coming from international high schools, they also differed in their study experiences regarding their learned subjects and whether they had foreign teachers. One participant, Serena, was actually in her third year of study when taking the FYC courses. I did not exclude her from the participants for further comparison. Learning about the writing trajectories of these participants who had different and overlapping background experiences benefited my study. I could examine how students with different high school experiences differed in their academic writing performance. I could also observe how taking FYC courses differs at different stages of study (either first-year or third year).

The following presents a summary, including each student's personal, linguistic, and educational background. Even though most of them came to Canada within the two preceding months and were new to the environment, these students exhibited great interest and intention to fit in and adapt to their academic studies in the new environment. According to the survey answers, the general information for the student participants follows:

Young. Young, a 21-year-old male student, transferred from a mainland Chinese university, which had an academic partnership with GBU. After finishing two years of

studies in China, Young came to Canada with uncertainties, excitement, and expectations to initiate his academic studies abroad. He entered GBU as a senior but was required by his program to register for the writing course COMP 100, usually set up for first-year students. Before that, he was recruited conditionally by the Department of Economics, since his language proficiency needed further improvement, and enrolled in a one-month Transitional program in August 2019. Young identified his listening and speaking as relatively strong, but his reading and writing as weak. After completing the short-term program and passing the exit exam with 82 (80 is the passing mark), Young entered his university studies and registered for five courses.

Zoey. Zoey, a female student, was also an exchange student from the same university that Young attended in China. She was enrolled in the Department of Finance and came to Canada at the beginning of September 2019. Since she received a full enrollment with an IELTS score of 7 (the minimum requirement is 6), she did not need any prerequisite language courses. Zoey took her study in a double-degree program. As long as she completes 30 credits required by both universities (the Chinese one and GBU), she would obtain a double-degree diploma. Zoey was confident with her English proficiency and felt proud of her university and learning experiences in China. In the first semester studying at GBU, Zoey chose five courses and felt pressured to complete all her courses successfully upon arriving in Canada.

MoMo. MoMo was a 19-year-old female freshman coming from Hebei, mainland China. She received her education in an international high school and showed quite a bit of familiarity with Canada's learning environment. Out of her parents' expectations and after comparing the conditions in the U.S. and Canada, MoMo finally decided to choose a Canadian university and felt very satisfied with both the living and studying environment at GBU. Before going abroad, MoMo learned English for almost eight years in China and

passed the Canadian Provincial Tests required for high school students in Canada. Since she had quite a few foreign teachers from Canada and was familiar with the western model of instruction in her high school, MoMo felt confident with the English-medium environment and her academic studies.

Gu. Gu was an 18-year-old Male student from Jiangsu, mainland China. He spoke English frequently and showed strong confidence in managing his study and life as a freshman. Similarly to MoMo, Gu came from an international language school, the Sino-America program. He received systematic education to study abroad in the U.S. and passed the American College Entrance (ACT) test at 30 and TOEFL Test at 100. Although he was not accepted by any university in the U.S. as his parents expected, Gu was happy to be in Canada. When he was in China, he also worked for a part-time job in language training, which prepared him well to communicate with people and live an independent life abroad.

Emily. Emily was also a freshman who came from an international high school in Jiangsu, China. I met her on the club day for recruiting members among first-year newcomers. She regarded various activities as an opportunity to learn new things and engage actively. Like MoMo and Gu, Emily received a score of 100 on the TOEFL Test, and her international high school experiences increased her familiarity with studying abroad. Emily had travelled abroad several times, and she had an uncle who lived in a town nearby to GBU. Emily told me that choosing a major in Business was her parents' idea. What she loves is arts and playing the piano. Despite this, she would be willing to exert efforts on her disciplinary studies for finding a job after graduation. Emily felt both motivated and pressured to enter university studies.

Serena. Coming from the capital city Beijing, mainland China, Serena was in her third year of studying in Canada when she enrolled in COMP 100. Serena believed academic writing was not as important since she was majoring in Math. Serena took the course only to

fulfill the requirements of the university and her program. She attended a traditional high school in China before studying abroad without taking the college entrance exam (*Gao Kao*). To meet the basic requirements for language proficiency, she took a training program for IELTS preparation at a language training school in China for a short time. She was conditionally enrolled by GBU, similar to Young. After completing a one-month Transitional program in 2016, she began her university studies. Serena reported her first two years in Canada helped to familiarize her with the academic and living environment. Different than other participants who ranked academic writing as the most crucial skill, Serena believed developing oral English frequency was crucial for her to fit into the Canadian culture and classroom dynamics. The following table shows the participants basic information:

Table 3.2

Lists of student participants information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Major	Prior Education	English Test (name and score)
Young	Male	21	Economics	College in China	IELTS 6 UAP 82
Zoey	Female	21	Finance	College in China	IELTS 7
MoMo	Female	18	Business	International high school	Provincial Test(past) IELTS 6.5
Emily	Female	18	Business	International high school	TOEFL 100
Gu	Male	18	Health Information Science	International high school	ACT 30 TOEFL 100
Serena	Female	21	Math	Chinese high school	IELTS 6 UAP 80

As shown, all the participants took official English exams before entering their studies at GBU. With their language proficiency considered, Zoey achieved a test score with IELTS 7 (out of a possible 9). Respectively, Gu and Emily scored 100 on the TOEFL (which indicate a great but not perfect score in English since the minimum requirement for entrance at GBU is 90). MoMo, Serena, and Young received IELTS scores of 6. It was also helpful to

see how their previous linguistic and educational experiences impacted their adaptation to academic writing studies. During our meeting, Emily, Gu, and MoMo, who graduated from an international school in China, showed confidence and familiarity with an English-medium environment but still felt new to the campus functions and teaching styles. In contrast, Zoey, Young, and Serena behaved more independently in managing their lives but were pressured by interacting in an English environment. In particular, Young expressed feelings of great pressure and anxiety when entering mainstream studies since he was the only Chinese international student in his COMP 100 class. As shown by the Survey answers, a shared concern was that almost every participant (five out of six) perceived COMP 100 was the most challenging course among all the courses in which they registered and considered they need help for improving academic writing.

Recruitment of Non-Student Participants. In order to gain multiple perspectives on the research topic and triangulate what the student participants perceived and identified, I also recruited non-student participants. In this study, non-student participants included four COMP 100 instructors and the AWE program director who was also an instructor of COMP 100. I met some composition faculty at a workshop on written feedback provided for student assignments one week before the semester. During the break time, I met the director of the AWE program and some instructors who taught first-year academic writing. The program advisor happily agreed to meet with me and showed she was very likely to get involved in my study. Two instructors in the workshop also expressed interest in participation, but they were unsure about the national origins of students in course enrollment at that time. To recruit more instructors for my study, I continuously connected with the potential participants by public emails when the fall 2019 semester started. I checked online on the lists of faculty names who would teach COMP 100 among the 46 sections. At the beginning, I wrote to ten instructors to inquire about their interest in participating in my study. The inquiry included an

attachment containing necessary study information and a recruitment poster (see Appendix B). Only one instructor responded to my email with an agreement in the first week. I then wrote to five more instructors again by email and got two additional instructors who expressed their interest in participation and provided me with their class syllabi for reference. Later, I connected with the AWE program director and two instructors again and obtained their confirmation for participating in this study. One instructor withdrew from the study before the interview due to time conflicts. Eventually, five non-student participants completed the study.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

In this qualitative case study, multiple data collection methods were employed to produce rich and thick descriptions and analyses of participants' writing-related perceptions, practices, and changes regarding academic writing in the FYC context. Data collection instruments included a background survey, semi-structured interviews, and a review of related documents, including COMP 100 course syllabus and students' voluntarily submitted writing assignments. Additionally, written reflections from students also served to illustrate students' weekly writing practices.

3.4.1 Instruments

Background survey. The questions were designed to elicit demographic information for students and composition faculty, as well as their general attitudes toward learning and teaching academic writing related to EAL writers. The students' version is designed with an intention to learn about students' previous educational experience, self-identified English proficiency, and general perception of academic writing. The composition faculty's version gathers information about their educational, professional backgrounds, and perceptions related to EAL writers, particularly with Chinese writers.

Semi-structured interviews with Chinese EAL students. All the students participated in a 45-60 minute individual interview twice over one semester. The semi-structured interviews aimed to elicit participants' feelings, experiences, and practices in the academic writing course throughout a four-month semester. The interviews were conducted in the language (English or Mandarin Chinese) that came naturally to individual participants.

Semi-structured interviews with non-student participants. The semi-structured interviews with composition administrators and instructors were conducted individually during the semester when administrators of AWE program and composition instructors were available. The instructors were asked about their attitudes, teaching experiences, and expectations regarding teaching EAL students, in particular Chinese students in their COMP 100 classes. The purpose of the interviews was to identify how instructors recognize and respond to Chinese EAL students' writing needs and challenges and examine what kind of pedagogical support they provide students.

Document collection. Documents collected included course syllabi, requirements of writing assignments, and students' voluntarily submitted writing assignments with teachers' feedback. The course outline showed teachers' instructional approaches, the focus of writing assignments, and students' expectations. Collecting and reading through the documents helped me to contextualize and expand the discussion with research participants in the interview.

Written reflections from student participants. Students were encouraged to reflect on their perceptions and practices in writing courses and write a short reflection every one or two weeks and send it to me either by email or on WeChat. The purpose was to track the process of their evolving perceptions and writing performance during the course process.

3.4.2 Research Procedure

After the research participants had been recruited and identified, a face-to-face meeting was scheduled with student participants in the second week of the semester. During the meeting, the students were introduced to the research topics, procedures, and expectations. They were invited to sign up the consent form (see Appendix C) when their interest to participate in the study was confirmed. During the semester, instructors were also asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix D), after any questions or concerns were addressed.

A background survey designed for students (see Appendix E) both on paper and a digital copy was delivered to them for completing including their demographic information, previous learning experiences, particularly related to writing in English, and their general attitude toward academic writing. Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F) were conducted in a study room in the campus library, which had been booked in advance. Each interview lasted from forty-five minutes to one hour and was audio-recorded with permission from the participants. English was used as the language for the interviews with one student choosing to use Mandarin Chinese for the communication since he felt less proficient and was nervous conversing in English. In most cases, after my questions, I would let students initiate the conversation and encouraged them to speak more. I also asked guiding questions and responded to their inquiries and their concerns for university life and living in Canada. Another round of semi-structured interviews with student participants was carried out at the end of the semester using similar procedures.

In addition to the two scheduled interviews, I also met each student participant informally in the middle of the semester, either at the library or a coffee shop on campus. The purpose was to check the digital copies of their online learning platform and discuss their current situations. Without the audio recording, I took notes on the critical points for our discussion, which helped trace the changes happening in students' learning journeys. Also,

meeting participants informally without recording helped sustain a friendly and trusting relationship between the participants and me, which further enhanced the smooth process of collecting data.

During the semester, I also asked students to submit their written assignments voluntarily throughout their study participation. My primary goal for collecting the assignments was to contextualize the discussion with students in the interview, check the instructors' comments and student interpretations, and potentially modify the subsequent interview questions. Some participants were asked to write and submit their written work during class time. In that case, I asked them to reflect on the topic and how they responded to it. If they had the in-class writing finished long before we met for an interview, they occasionally forgot the details. Given the voluntary nature of the assignment submission, this created variation across participants. Some assignments were handwritten, and some were digital copies. Most participants forgot to send me an extra copy of their assignments until I sent them a reminder asking for it. Some participants were more reluctant to share the feedback and grades they received from instructors than others. Their hesitation mainly resulted from their uncomfortable feeling to share lower grades that they received. Since the nature of submitting their assignments was voluntary, I did not pressure them to submit. I highlighted the words, phrases, and sentences in their assignments for the purpose of further discussion in our meeting or for characterizing the features or changes of their written drafts. Whenever possible, I also collected the course syllabus from each student and instructions for assignments and teachers' feedback. Those documents were helpful for me to situate myself into the FYC context and capture the differences among instructors in terms of their pedagogical approaches, individual support for EAL learners in their class, and features of interaction with students within multi-modal spaces, although I did not have access to direct class observation.

To trace the process of development and writing issues and sustain smooth communication with the student participants, I also occasionally connected with them on WeChat to inquire about their perceptions and writing experiences in their FYC courses during the semester. Despite their busy study load, all participants responded actively in online chatting, although some replied with a delay. Some participants even connected with me voluntarily and willingly sent me their written reflections when they felt frustrated or delighted with their writing processes or products. They sometimes turned to me when they had concerns about how to utilize campus facilities and services. The informal meetings also helped build a relationship of mutual trust, which I believed would consolidate the validity of the information I collected. Most of them also sent me a written reflection of their writing courses through WeChat messages upon finishing the class. Interactively, students were willing to share with me information in terms of their frustrations, stresses, and fulfillment from composing and completing their writing assignments.

The interviews with non-student participants were similar to the student participant interviews. Due to instructors' busy schedules or workloads, we usually scheduled the meeting time in advance and had email exchanges for emerging questions or concerns. By following research procedures, I first sent each participant a digital form of background survey (see Appendix G) for gathering the information in terms of their teaching backgrounds and some general comments on Chinese EAL learners. After receiving their responses, I scheduled the meeting with each participant either in their office or a study room in the library. I met the AWE program director at her office twice (one meeting was audio-recorded and one was not), who introduced me in detail to the program information and provided me with some related documents with rich information. I also interviewed other four composition faculty once during the semester Fall in 2019 with tape-recording. Each semi-structured interview (see Appendix H) lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. In addition to these participants,

I informally met the coordinator of COMP 100, the director of COMP 100, the manager and two tutors at the Writing Center, and the director of International Students Services. Since they only agreed to meet informally, I took notes on key points in our discussions without audio-recordings. These non-student participants provided me with valuable information and helped me better understand the institutional context and support systems for EAL learners on campus.

3.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation: Thematic Analysis

Informed by the information for conducting qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018) and phases of conducting thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012), the interview and survey data in this study have been analyzed thematically. As Braun and Clarke (2012) note, thematic analysis is a flexible and accessible tool for conducting qualitative analysis and “a method for systematically identifying, organizing and offering insights into patterns of meanings (themes) across a data set” (p. 57). Guided by the research questions and theatrical frameworks for this study, I coded and analyzed the data across surveys and interviews in a recursive manner to identify any prevalent or unique patterns of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). Although I employed a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, the overall orientation of analysis is more inductive and data-driven by prioritizing the voices and experiences of participants. Several stages can be identified, from raw data to a rich theoretical understanding of themes and categories. There were no clear boundaries and iterative cycles in practice.

Data Preparation and Familiarity. Intending to understand the whole study thoroughly, I have engaged with the data analytically since the stage of collecting the data. After the first set of interviews, I began to transcribe all the verbal data on my own and check for accuracy by repeatedly listening to the recordings. Every audio-recorded interview was transcribed

fully and translated (one case, from Mandarin Chinese into English) into written text. The transcripts were further reviewed and verified for accuracy by immersive reading and rereading the data. The course-related documents, including course outlines, syllabi, and students' voluntarily submitted written assignments with instructors' feedback, were also reviewed and stored in preparation for document analysis.

To familiarize myself with the research data in a holistic way, I also put each student participant's information into folders with different colours, including the survey, interview transcription, related documents, and written reflections assigned by each individual. During the data analysis process, I also kept written notes for reflecting on my ideas and questions on the engagements with data sets.

Open and Initial Coding Facilitated by a Web-based Program. After reading through the whole data set several times and developing some initial ideas, I began to conduct the formal initial coding facilitated by data analysis software, *Dedoose*. Using software for data analysis was also a process of familiarizing myself more with the data. All data were entered into the program and organized according to each participant. Since codes are the essential elements of the raw data with identified features (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I then performed the initial coding process. I highlighted the keywords, phrases, or sections of texts that corresponded to features and meaningful aspects of participants' perceptions and experiences related to their academic writing. With the ongoing and deepening understanding of the data sets, some codes were collated, deleted, or re-grouped into different code clusters representing new logical relations. The web-based program was convenient to code extracts of data and make changes in the coding process. I also benefited from the software function of keeping memos and notes, which could be attached to codes at different levels during the coding process. After identifying lists of codes, I further checked the matches between extracts and their

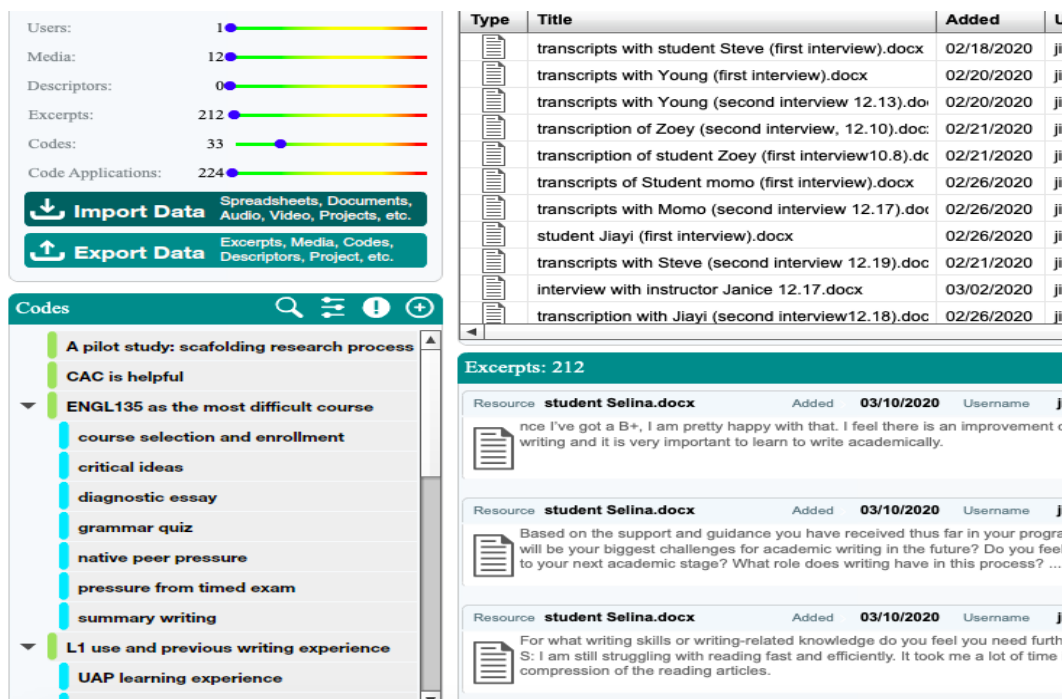
corresponding codes for the accuracy of semantic meaning and relevance. Some examples of the initial codes are as follows (as shown in Figure 3.1):

- *being international students as newcomers*
- *unfamiliar with academic requirements*
- *feeling challenged and anxious*
- *Writing Center is helpful*
- *instructors are nice and supportive*
- *sense of inferiority compared with native speakers*

Grouping Codes into Themes and Patterns. The purpose of the second and third cycles of coding was to group the summarized chunks of text or segments into a smaller number of categories or themes with analytical sense (Miles et al., 2014) and to refocus the analysis at a broader level (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). As Braun and Clarke (2006) note, a theme matters in “whether it captures something important concerning the overall research question” or “...in terms of the number of different speakers who articulated the theme across the entire data set...” (p. 82). Considering the identified codes across data sets, the theoretical framework, and research questions for guiding the study, I identified that the main focus at this phase was to categorize different codes into code groups and potential overarching themes. During the ongoing comparing and synthesizing codes, three main emerging themes and their correlations were identified, which formed the foundations for the following three chapters.

Figure 3.1

Screenshot of Initial coding in a web-based program



3.6 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

As an emerging researcher, I took great care to ensure that my study was ethically conducted. There are several ethical considerations included in my study. One was applying for informed consent from participants. I did not start to recruit my participants until the Ethics Office approved me at my home university to conduct research with human participants. Every participant was informed about the research procedures and purpose before the study began and its potential risks and benefits. They were free to participate or withdraw from the study at any point with no consequences. Second, to protect the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of the data, I chose a quiet study room in the library to interview participants at a convenient time for them. At the beginning of each interview, I asked permission from each participant to have the interview audio-recorded. I reminded them that they could choose to answer only the questions with which they felt comfortable. To protect each participant's identity in the study, I had each choose a pseudonym before I began the first interview. Those pseudonyms were also used consistently with any reference

to participants in my notes, transcriptions of interviews, and final report. The primary purpose of this study is to understand in-depth the perceptions and experiences of Chinese EAL learners in the context of the FYC course, with no intention to evaluate or criticize the course program or any instructor who provided valuable information and different perspectives on the investigated issue. Further, I did my best to build rapport and trusting relationships with participants. I found myself being accepted and trusted when student participants shared details of their frustrations.

The data collection process was assisted with member checking and complementary data collection methods to capture diverse perspectives. During data collection, participants were invited to review the transcription of their audio recordings. I asked for clarification by email in terms of any transcription of text when I felt uncertain. This member checking helped enhance the transcribed audio data's accuracy and informed the procedure for data collection. The data were collected from various sources in this study, including background surveys, semi-structured interviews, reviewing related documents, and students' voluntarily submitted assignments. In addition to collecting data from various sources, I also investigated the perspectives from both students and faculty to triangulate and verify an understanding of the relevant themes and interpretation of the data. Furthermore, I was greatly aided by a critical colleague who provided constructive feedback on the interpretation and analysis of data. I also benefited a lot from her background knowledge as an EAL specialist who tutored EAL writers and was a COMP 100 instructor. The two of us met (either via face-to-face or online discussion) for an hour per week, almost through an entire academic year. She also provided me with valuable insights on my initial thematic map at the stage of data analysis.

3.7. Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the research design for the present study, which includes my employment of multiple – case study, research context, data collection tools, and

the use of thematic analysis for analyzing the questionnaire and interview data. In addition to that, I have also reflected on my role as a researcher and the trustworthiness and validity of the research design. In the next three chapters, I discuss the results from this study, organized around the main themes interpreted from the data.

Chapter 4. Understanding Chinese EAL Writers' Perceived and Identified Needs and Challenges in FYC Courses: A Comparison of Perspectives

A key motivation of this study is to understand better how Chinese EAL learners negotiate their academic experiences in mainstream FYC courses, especially to investigate the challenges or difficulties they encountered in the learning process from an ecological perspective to language learning and academic language socialization (Duff, 2010; 2019; Steffensen & Kramsch, 2017; van Lier, 2004; 2008b). In this chapter, I discuss this phenomenon by examining and comparing the perspectives and experiences of EAL students, as well as how composition faculty perceive and pedagogically respond to EAL students' needs. Three main overarching questions guided this chapter: (1) What academic writing needs and challenges do Chinese EAL students perceive and identify when taking the first-year academic writing requirement course COMP 100? (2) What writing needs and challenges of Chinese EAL students do composition faculty identify? (3) How are the two groups similar to or different from each other?

The data in this section are drawn mainly from background survey and follow-up interviews with students. In order to learn about students' writing trajectories and the changes they experienced, I arranged two sets of interviews with the six student participants. The first round of interviews, which was set at the beginning of the semester, aimed to capture students' experiences upon entering the mainstream composition class. The questions were designed to explore their initial impression of university life, previous experiences with academic writing, understanding of course expectations, as well as their completion of written assignments. In particular, I paid attention to their perceived challenges when they entered and how these identified challenges changed, improved, or further evolved by the end of the semester. The second round of interviews focused on asking questions about whether

their challenges had remained and how they worked through various difficulties by seeking help from the available sources and resources.

Additionally, with the purpose of gaining a holistic understanding of students' experiences, this study also explored administrators and composition instructors' perspectives of Chinese EAL learners' academic writing performance and related challenges. In the following section, I first report students' perceptions and practices related to taking their FYC courses. I then present how AWE administrators and composition instructors perceived the academic writing challenges and needs of Chinese EAL learners. By synthesizing the perspectives of both instructors and students, this section further explores the similarities and differences between these two groups, which could contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature and complexities of academic writing among EAL students in mainstream composition studies.

4.1 Students' Perspectives: "Everything Seems New"

In general, student participants perceived academic writing as critical for their academic studies and reported that their FYC courses were challenging, especially at the initial stage when they entered their composition studies. As Table 4.1 showed, in answering the survey question of which language skill they considered to be the most important for academic studies at university, five out of six selected "writing" or "reading and writing," since they believe strong academic writing abilities were required and crucial for their studies across disciplines. In the survey answers, MoMo explained that "in many courses, students are required to write academic essays such as critical and research papers. Also, academic writing is compulsory for international students." Similarly, Gu, who also graduated from an international high school in China, realized the close connection between reading and writing by commenting that "academic studies highly rely on writing. However, good-quality writing always bases on a huge amount of reading. Compared with speaking and listening, reading,

and writing are relatively more important.” In contrast to other participants, Serena, a third-year student taking the course, thought listening and speaking were more important based on her focused attention on the need to understand what instructors imparted in class and to interact well with classmates and native speakers.

Table 4.1

Students’ general perceptions of academic writing

Pseudonym	Most important language skill for university studies (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)	Self-perceived writing abilities	Did you learn how to write academically in English before?	Is your academic writing course COMP 100 challenging?	Do you need help for academic writing?
Young	Writing	Weak	No	Yes	Yes
Zoey	Writing	Moderate	No	Yes	Yes
MoMo	Writing	Weak	No	Yes	Yes
Emily	Writing	Weak	No	Yes	Yes
Gu	Reading and writing	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes
Serena	Speaking and Listening	Moderate	Yes	No	Yes

As shown in the second column of Table 4.1, with consideration to the domain of writing skills, five students marked their category of writing as either “moderate” or “weak;” only one student, Gu, marked his writing skill as “good.” These results demonstrated students’ self-perceived lack of capacities and confidence in their writing practice. When asked if they had previous academic writing experiences, four students answered “No.” And two students marked “Yes:” Gu indicated he learned how to write academically in his high school, and Serena mentioned that she learned how to write academically from her previous EAP class. Additionally, a shared concern among students was that most participants (five out of six) perceived academic writing to be challenging and considered that they needed help to improve their academic writing. The survey findings, therefore, showed that students were

fully aware of the importance of academic writing for their studies, but felt challenged and uncertain about taking their FYC courses.

Drawing from interview data, the following section further reports writing trajectories of participants when taking their FYC courses by prioritizing students' perspectives. During the process of taking their composition studies, EAL learners kept negotiating academic activities and relations, which mainly manifested in the following aspects: relearning language skills for academic communication, accommodating course requirements and academic conventions, navigating intensive reading tasks and critical thinking, and negotiating self-positioning to native English speakers. From an ecological and LS perspective, I highlight the complexities of academic writing and the nature of challenges that EAL students experienced.

4.1.1 Relearning Language Skills for Academic Communication

Aligned with what has been reported in previous scholarship focusing on similar population groups (e.g., Jiao, 2006; Zhang & Zhou, 2010), this study found student participants felt their language capacities were insufficient to perform well in their composition courses. During the first set of interviews, all students indicated COMP 100 was the most challenging course they took among the first-year courses by frequently citing the high requirement for English proficiency, despite some of them having graduated from an international or offshore high school in China. International offshore high schools are certified schools that operate outside of Canada, which transfer teachers and curriculum to students studying in their home countries, such as China. A recent study by Alexander (2019), which focused particularly on Chinese BCOS graduates' experiences, found his participants could transfer smoothly into their university studies, but also encountered some challenges such as increased reading assignments. In this study, MoMo, who graduated from a BC Offshore school in China, presented confidence with her oral English and emphasized

that she had no difficulties in communicating with people socially in her daily life. However, she also reported feeling pressured to follow her instructor in course delivery by framing her experience in the changing learning environment:

I thought my English was good when I was in China but now compared to native speakers of my classmates in Canada, I feel there is a gap between me and them for academic reading and writing, such as following the instructor. (First Interview, September 18, 2019)

As MoMo explained, she felt stressed to understand what her instructor said because of his fast pace of speaking and the need to take notes at the same time. When asked whether her instructor used slides, paper copies, or other digital tools in class, MoMo replied that her instructor seldom included those supporting materials in course delivery, which also frustrated her since she had few materials to refer to when she wanted to review her course content after class. Similarly, Young felt less confident with his English capacities, especially upon entering his course. In our first interview, Young recalled: “I used to sit in the first line of the classroom and always actively spoke in my previous English class, but now I tend to keep silent due to my underdeveloped English” (First interview, September 8, 2019).

Ecologically, the changes of learning environment play a crucial role in students’ academic performance. Previously, they studied either in an EFL (English as a foreign language) environment or EAP training classes. Transitioning into mainstream composition classes, which assumed students were native-like English speakers, therefore posed a big challenge for EAL students.

Additionally, most student participants felt their limited English capacities were a barrier for them to communicate either in oral or written activities, such as, group discussion or writing short essays in class. When asked about whether and how English capacities impact their academic performance, Emily responded that her limited linguistic expressions

prevent her from fully articulating her ideas and participating in the group discussion.

Although she had a strong impulse to be involved and answer her instructor's question voluntarily, she tended to keep silent most of the time. As Emily commented, "I wish I could answer the teacher's questions actively, but I feel a bit shy to share my opinions in class" (First interview, September 18, 2019). Immersed in an English environment, the student participants feel the need to learn skills for academic communication, either through oral or written methods. With regard to language socialization theories, the students realized the necessity to develop their English proficiency since academic English, especially in the form of writing, serves as a means to socialize themselves into their expected academic writing practice and as a way to communicate efficiently with instructors and peers in their discourse communities.

4.1.2 Accommodating Course Requirements and Academic Conventions

In addition to relearning language skills for academic communications, student participants in this study also demonstrated a strong lack of familiarity in adjusting to specific course requirements and academic conventions. In addition to the issue of formatting, some students reported they were unfamiliar with some academic expectations for completing their written assignments, especially when the requirements were not explicitly listed or explained by the instructors, such as writing in a simple and concise way, or demonstrating abilities of critical thinking. In the current study, Gu reported that he was unaware of including a citation in a standardized format for summary writing until he completed his first exam. He shared with me his experiences of "writing off-topic" on his second exam for summary writing because he misunderstood the requirement: "I think I misunderstood the requirement of summary writing. There was a word in the description of the requirement that I understood it in a different way, and I should ask professors for clarifications" (Second Interview, December 19, 2019). Although Gu claimed the responsibility for "writing off-topic" and

reflected that he should have asked for clarification when taking the exam, his description also showed that he did not receive explicit instructions on the writing requirements when taking exams. He encountered similar situations later in his class and received a “learned lesson,” in in-class writing activities, but was given no chance to make amendments since the written work was exam-based. With regard to the written assignments, Gu further indicated he needed to redirect his attention to learn how to write appropriately on his own as required by each assignment since he felt each assignment was disconnected. Other student participants similarly reported they felt pressured to interpret course requirements, understand the writing assignments as expected, and compose the required essays.

Among various types of written assignments, genre analysis was reported to be the most challenging assignment. Understanding genres as a way to communicate is not an easy task for students. Student participants felt especially challenged by understanding the concept of academic genres and applying it in the required analysis. Serena reported that she struggled to understand the real purpose of the author although she spent lots of time reading the assigned article. Similarly, Young expressed his confusion on the assignment of genre analysis. In addition to struggling with understanding concepts, Young also felt his confusion was strengthened since he obtained different explanations on this assignment from the course instructor and a tutor at the Writing Center:

I felt my instructor asked me to analyze the features of three types of reading: peer-reviewed article, blog and a popular press article. However, the tutor told me to focus on structural features such as abstract and charts. I became confused. I think maybe I hope to get a standardized answer or criteria for doing things in the correct way. That is what I really need. I wish to follow one rule or way of doing things rather than in multiple ways. (First Interview, September 8, 2019)

According to Young's description, the diverse interpretations from various sources (instructor, writing tutor) on his genre assignments were a key factor that contributed to his uncertainties and frustrations in managing his written assignment for the genre analysis. The assignment guideline that Young shared with me showed this task required students to find three examples of a particular genre from three types of sources: a peer-reviewed article, blog, and a popular press article, and to analyze the rhetorical conventions for the chosen genre. As Young further explained, he thought his instructor required them to analyze a genre in a broader sense, such as science writing, which can be illustrated by the three types of articles. However, the tutor at the writing center suggested him to focus on comparing the different rhetorical features of a peer-reviewed article, blog, or popular press article, such as the use of in-text citation. From a language socialization perspective, Young was socialized into different academic practices through the genre analysis assignment by his instructor and the writing tutor, which obfuscated his accurate understanding of the written task.

Furthermore, as Young reported, his preference to obtain a standardized way or "formulaic" application of a template to a more critical engagement with different modes of writing may serve as another contributing reason for his struggles. It is worth noting that students' unfamiliarity with the requirements of written assignments and course expectations was greatly reduced when they engaged positively with course activities and had access to resources to support them. Some learners also developed their own ways to prepare, engage with, and complete their assignments and interact effectively with instructors, peers, and other agents who could support their needs. Specifically, students recognized the role of the learner agency in managing their composition studies, such as checking the online platform for their coursework often, reading through their textbooks or assigned reading in advance, reminding themselves of the deadlines for exams, and setting plans for reaching their goals.

Their enactment of learner agency and resourcefulness will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

4.1.3 Navigating Intensive Reading Tasks and Critical Thinking

In addition to struggling with improving language skills for academic communication and familiarizing with writing requirements, participants also indicated they were burdened with assigned academic readings. Echoing previous studies reporting reading challenges for EAL students (Siczek, 2014; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), student participants in this study also reported that academic readings were hard for them to comprehend. For instance, MoMo noted that her challenges in reading depended on the type of assigned articles. In some cases, the vocabulary was difficult for her to comprehend and she spent quite a lot of time reading, usually until midnight the day before class time. As she explained:

It took me a lot of time since there are terminologies in the contents of academic articles. I need to look up for them in the dictionary in order to really understand the article. In addition, the writing style of articles are quite different, I need to spend time to figure that out. Since the writing is based on the understanding of reading articles, if I wish to write well, I need to first understand the reading well. (First interview, September 18, 2019)

Like MoMo, other student participants indicated their challenges in reading assigned articles and it seemed there was no quick fix to this identified issue. In the second round of interviews at the end of the semester, most participants reported no obvious progress with their reading abilities. For example, when asked about whether she made any improvement in her readings, Zoey commented: “I don’t feel my reading abilities have been improved. it is still difficult for me” (Second interview, December 18, 2019). Although having completed all the written assignments when we met for an interview, Serena also reported that she “still

struggled with reading fast and efficiently,” especially in an exam environment (Second interview, December 28, 2019).

Closely related to comprehending assigned readings, developing critical thinking skills in reading and writing activities is one of the major goals of FYC courses. Students were required to understand and integrate what they have read into their own writing. When asked about the process of writing their research paper, most participants reflected that it was challenging for them to integrate and evaluate critically the perspectives of sources and express their own ideas. Zoey used “critical thinking” to define how she understood the feature of academic writing and further illustrated:

Zoey: I need to write something by considering many perspectives and respond critically. Before taking the course, I used to write, “this paper argues...that paper proposed...”

Jing: how do you express your own ideas when you write?

Zoey: I know it is important to express my own ideas. But it is so difficult for me.

Although I proposed some suggestions in my research paper, I hesitated to argue for some of my ideas. (Second interview, December 28, 2019)

This extract illustrated Zoey’s awareness of her difficulties in engaging with the reading sources and integrating her own perspectives. It was a process for her to learn how to become a novice academic writer by writing. Similarly, Young found it hard to express his own ideas in composing his research paper when asked how he improved his reading or writing skills:

Jing: What kind of writing skills or knowledge have you developed from taking COMP 100?

Young: I’ve learned to search for information and resources. The key ideas from the reading resources can be used as evidence to include in my own research paper. My main arguments actually are decided by the information I collected.

Jing: Can you please explain more about it?

Young: Yes. I mean writing a research paper is like a project of paraphrasing. I mainly summarized the ideas from others, with little of my own opinions.

(Second interview, December 18, 2019)

By describing the writing process as “a project of paraphrasing,” Young indicated the difficulties of how to appropriately integrate others’ perspectives and express his own opinions. Unlike Zoey, Young seemed less reflective on the skill of “critical thinking” required for composing his research paper. The illustrative cases of Zoey and Young echoed prior literature that the Chinese learner often cited “critical thinking” as a major challenge for their academic studies (Heng, 2018; Wu, 2015). In this study, although critically evaluating the sources and taking an authorial stance still pose a challenge for participants like Young, most participants also showed their strengthened understanding of academic conventions and improved writing practices by engaging with various reading sources and learning to use them as evidence in their argumentation. From an ecological and LS perspective, these changes and progress that EAL writers achieved cannot be overlooked. It takes time for these students as EAL learners to learn and consolidate the required knowledge and skills, which are not easily measured by exams or other forms of assessment within a short period of time.

4.1.4 Negotiating Self-Positioning to Native English-Speaking (NES) Peers

In addition to the need for improving language capacities, negotiating academic writing conventions and managing complex reading tasks, the fourth key theme that emerged from the two rounds of interview data was participants’ negotiation of self-positioning in their FYC courses and academic communities. In fact, their self-positioning within the classroom situation or larger academic disciplinary communities was presented as situated and relational; mainly shaped by their perception of their English abilities, classroom performance, and evolved knowledge in relation to NES classmates. Overwhelmingly,

participants articulated that they felt intimidated to speak out in group discussions and interact with native English-speaking peers. For instance, Emily mentioned that she wished to speak out in class, but it was hard for her to “respond as quickly as native [English-speaking] students who were so active” (First interview, December 18, 2019). Similarly, MoMo felt disadvantaged when responding to the instructor’s questions since her NES classmates had already started speaking while she was trying to take notes on what the teacher said. Thus, student participants tended to perceive themselves as deficient in relation to their NES peers, especially in the early stages of taking their composition courses.

Feeling challenged by transitioning into the mainstream composition classroom, the most obvious case was Young. As the only EAL learner in his classroom, Young felt a deep sense of loneliness and invisibility in his composition classroom. As he described, his instructor treated him the same as a native English-speaking student in course delivery and daily communication. Young expressed his frustration and stress when we first met: “I lose all my courage every time when taking my composition course. Compared to native [English] speakers, I am inferior to them at every aspect” (First interview, September 10, 2019). He also found it hard to fit into his classroom:

Because I am the only Chinese in my class, the teacher just treats me like the native students. I cannot fully understand what the teacher said in-class time. Since she might tell a joke that only native speakers can understand. I felt lost and sad about it since I cannot figure out what is happening. (First interview, September 8, 2019)

The ways that Young reported being treated by his instructor highlight the mainstreaming model of teaching composition courses. For his instructor, it was likely hard to take account of Young’s individual needs since the majority of students were NES. That was also a potential reason that Young’s instructor suggested that he should withdraw from the course. From a language socialization perspective, how students position themselves

compared to their more competent and proficient peers can serve as a form of self-socialization, which can impact students' formation of identity and self-worth, as well as their sense of belongings on whether to be legitimate members of their communities or disciplines (Anderson, 2017; Duff, 2010). In this study, due to the unfavourable classroom conditions, Young tended to socialize himself and was socialized by his instructor and peers into a marginalized position. In particular, he felt isolated and disengaged in classroom activities, as he recalled, "I felt so lonely, and I seldom communicate with my classmates" (First interview, September 8, 2019).

As the students in this study kept improving their writing practices in the process of taking their composition classes, their self-positioning also shifted, since such perceived inferiority to NES students was situated and relational. When they gradually felt the knowledge they had could be shared with peers and received positive comments from interactive activities, they tended to gain confidence and voluntarily interacted with people around them. In the first interview, MoMo noted that she felt comfortable sharing her ideas in a small group discussion with two or three classmates. Similarly, Zoey recalled she felt "a sense of relief" when her NES classmates complained that the assignment was hard and complicated: "I was feeling they encounter difficulties just as same as me" (First interview, September 20, 2019) which highlighted the relational nature of her self-positioning in the classroom setting. Near the end of the course most participants reported they had more mutual interactions with their NES peers. Serena reported that she was understood and supported by her NES classmates who gave full respect to her opinions in the group discussions. Emily and MoMo also noted that their NES peers helped them to understand the course readings and gave them constructive suggestions on their written drafts in peer editing activities. They gained a sense of mutual interaction that promoted their adaptation in both classroom environments and even during after-class communication. Thus, it can be inferred

that students' self-positioning in their situated FYC classes is partially co-constructed through the interactions with their instructors and NES peers.

4.2 Composition Faculty's Perspectives: "Some of Them (Chinese EAL learners) are Not Ready to Take the Course"

Altogether, five instructors (Dir included) participated in my study. Each of them completed a background survey that documented their demographic information and general perspectives on working with EAL learners, especially those who are Chinese. As instructors' teaching approaches might be impacted by the ways that they perceive and act on EAL issues (Ferris et al., 2011), I asked instructors questions (both in surveys and interviews) about their course expectations, their requirements for various assignments, the types and focus of the written feedback they provide, as well as their expectations and suggestions for EAL learners. Particularly, I explored how instructors perceived the strengths and struggles of Chinese EAL learners in their classrooms in terms of students' oral and written performance. Their responses helped me understand how instructors perceived the specific needs of EAL learners and the pedagogical support they provided for students.

During meetings with instructors, I had two observations: first, most instructors were wary of stereotyping EAL learners. They tended to recognize that each student is an individual learner with his or her own unique strengths and needs. Since their classroom is diverse in multiple ways, instructors hesitated to generalize about students with respect to ethical or cultural issues but tended to comment on individual differences. Second, most instructors believed that asking students about their linguistic or cultural background is inappropriate. When asked questions about Chinese EAL learners in their class, instructors tended to address students' performance in terms of the broader category of EAL learners or international students as a whole. As one instructor explained in the survey answers "I think asking students of a particular background is problematic. EAL learners, like all students,

shouldn't be required to disclose information to their instructor". In the email exchanges before the interview, another instructor also expressed his difficulties with identifying the students from China. He finally sent an email to the student whom he predicted coming from China for confirmation.

Generally, instructors in this study tended to view Chinese EAL learners positively, despite the acknowledgement that each student has individual struggles and strengths. As indicated in the survey answers shown in Table 4.2, in terms of their strengths, instructors indicated that Chinese EAL students in their classes are hard-working and committed to their studies. In addition, they consider these students as having a solid grasp of grammatical knowledge and clear ideas to express in their essay writing.

Furthermore, instructors commented positively on students' strong commitment to their composition studies. Jan, as both a classroom instructor and Writing Center tutor, spoke quite highly of her EAL learners in terms of their attitude and commitment toward learning in an English medium context by comparing themselves with some NES Canadian students:

Because EAL students who have different high school experiences, are new to Canada and they don't necessarily know what to expect, they tend to listen to my instructions and do the reading and follow the template and do the best that they can take my feedback and use it. Whereas a lot of native speakers who did well in high school assume that they know what to do. They ignore the advice I give them and then don't do very well on the assignments always. They don't have that sort of pause in self-assessment that I think lots of EAL students do. (Interview, December 17, 2019)

For either L1 or EAL learners, as Jan pointed out, it is important to follow instructions and course expectations as well as value instructors' feedback in accommodating to the academic environment on campus. Research in L2 academic writing that focuses on the nuanced diversities of EAL learners by comparing them with their L1 counterparts also found

the mere native status of L1 students may not guarantee their academic success; comparatively, L2 writers are more aware of their struggles, adaptive to changes and make progress (e.g., Eckstein & Ferris, 2018; Stuart, 2012). In this study, most student participants committed strongly to their composition studies while acknowledging their limitations in a new academic environment. They were more likely to transfer the challenges they encountered into learning opportunities.

In addition to the identified strengths, there are also aspects that instructors perceived the Chinese EAL learners in their sections struggled with and needed additional support, mainly for academic oral and written performance. In this section, I report on instructors' perceptions and comments on Chinese EAL learners' academic performance in FYC courses and how they responded to students' needs and concerns. In terms of oral communication, the instructors unanimously perceived that Chinese EAL learners in their classes tended to be quiet and less willing to speak up in class discussions. For instance, Stephen commented, "they don't contribute voluntarily to class comments" and "they [Chinese students] speak their own languages when they're in peer feedback and they tend to gravitate toward each other" (Interview, Sep 28, 2019). Other instructors also indicated that EAL learners tended to be intimidated to speak out in classroom discussions. Iris, who had tried to encourage students' participation by individually coaching students, commented: "They are so quiet and shy. It takes me a lot of coaching, especially to have EAL students ask questions face-to-face in the classroom context (October 18, 2019). From an academic LS perspective, although composition instructors socialized students into expected academic writing practices, it takes time for EAL students adjust themselves into the socialization process. Other instructors also commented on the inactive participation of Chinese students in their sections.

Table 4.2

Results of the survey of instructors' comments on Chinese EAL learners and their provided feedback with additional comments

Instructors	The most challenging aspect of academic writing among Chinese EAL learners	The least challenging aspect of academic writing among Chinese EAL learners	The type of feedback provided to EAL learners	Additional comments
Stephen	Language frequency; Understanding the assignments; Reading comprehension	Usually hard workers	In general, I provide the same feedback to all of my students in terms of essay writing skills.	I often tell them to see the Writing Center if they are having prose issues.
Jan	Reading comprehension; More time needed to feel comfortable to speak in class	The actual ideas. I've never found that the quality of ideas or critical thinking or actual argument is impacted by a student's first language.	Based on the first assignment, I think EAL students will struggle to meet the writing standards in the class. I send them resources about COMP 100, the Writing Center, the CAL, and international student Services. For the actual assignments, I give the same feedback I give to native English speakers.	Honestly, I don't feel like I have adequate training in supporting EAL students to be their primary source of support or to most effectively address their specific learning needs.
Ann	The article uses; tenses; Reading comprehension	Not sure.	Feedback on content/analysis and feedback on the most prominent grammatical/syntactical issues. I typically advise all my students who struggle with writing or reading comprehension (EAL and students for whom English is not their first language) to make an appointment with either	I think asking students of a particular background to provide additional information is problematic. EAL learners, like all students, shouldn't be required to

			myself or someone at the Center for Academic Communication.	disclose information to their instructor.
Iris	Learning mechanical; academic conventions; Learning the course expectations	Conveying clear analysis and understanding grammatical terms and categories.	I divide my feedback into a) content and conceptual stuff—what ideas are being communicated, what’s awesome about them, and what can be further honed and specified; and b) mechanical conventions such as punctuation, citations, and structure. I tend to focus on grammatical editing as a final level of high polish.	I think voluntary and contextual self-identification is important. But maybe EAL students could be invited by advocacy groups.
Dir	A gap between their academic preparation and current academic requirement; English sentence proficiency; Understanding certain type of assignments	Students tend to be brilliant, motivated, committed to an academic major.	Written feedback on assignments; offering office hours; emailing feedback on overall performance.	

Characteristics such as EAL learners being inactive in oral participation have been well documented and discussed in previous studies, and this is often attributed to their shyness, limited language capacities, or differences in cultural and educational background (e.g., Huang & Klinger, 2006; Ruble & Zhang, 2013). In this study, most instructors, especially those who have had experiences as language learners or studying abroad, showed their empathetic understanding and patience in helping and supporting their students. Iris, for example, speaks Mandarin Chinese since she worked for three years in a high school in Da Lian, a seaside city in China. Her experiences of working and living in China have made her familiar with China’s culture and the educational system. Putting herself in a learner’s

position, Jan commented, “I know it took longer for them to be comfortable speaking in class than it did for other students. And fair enough, I think I would be scared and self-conscious and need extra time to think if I was speaking an additional language (Interview, December 17, 2019) Therefore, instructors expressed that they were willing to provide support or coaching to facilitate the oral communication abilities of EAL students when students ask for help.

In addition to oral communication, instructors indicated that some of their Chinese EAL learners face challenges navigating reading and writing tasks. As the course name “academic reading and writing” suggests, developing comprehensive reading abilities and skills is as important as writing. Reading comprehension is a threshold required skill for participants in this study to complete their writing assignments, which is usually based on various types of academic readings. Reading effectively and efficiently, however, requires composition instructors to train students to develop academic literacy, sometimes involving cultural and disciplinary knowledge. Moreover, as shown in Table 4.2, three instructors reported in the surveys that Chinese EAL learners in their sections struggled with reading comprehension. In the follow-up interviews, Iris further pointed out that EAL learners struggle to understand the audience and purpose when reading academic articles, particularly, and those difficulties are beyond English language proficiencies such as vocabulary or grammar.

Instructors also identified that completing certain writing assignments was challenging for Chinese EAL students. For instance, instructors reported that their assignments tended to be “too short” and their first drafts did not fulfill the minimum word-count requirement. Furthermore, instructors thought EAL students might be struggling with truly understanding the requirements of assignments. As Iris commented, “I think that they [Chinese EAL learners] failed to connect the interpretations of the assignments with their

own thoughts (Interview, October 10, 2019). In response to students' challenges, Iris recalled that she usually scheduled face-to-face meetings with students who had struggled with understanding the assignment requirements and talked about how to interpret the requirements by guiding students through the process.

Additionally, instructors highlighted that some students have difficulties in understanding some basic terminology, such as "genre" or "rhetorical devices" in academic writing. Ann described a case in her class in which one of her Chinese EAL learners struggled with the term "genre":

I have one student who I know is from China because we've had conversations and who visited me regularly during office hours, told me she didn't understand a term I was using. She said, I don't understand what you mean by rhetoric or a rhetorical device. She says I memorize the definition you gave in class, but I still don't understand what that means. Can you clarify? Sometimes I could see from the way I was explaining it wasn't really registering with her. (Interview, January 16, 2020)

With regard to the rhetorical analysis assignment, as the course syllabus showed, instructors expect students to utilize three persuasive appeals (namely, ethos, pathos, and logos) when analyzing rhetorical features of articles of different genre types. As Ann pointed out, the issue of understanding academic genres creates difficulties for EAL learners when they are improving their English proficiency and coming from different cultural contexts. Echoing what Ann said, Iris also found that EAL learners may be specifically challenged by how to understand the conventions of academic genres and the features of the rhetorical moves in any given genre. Although it might challenge English L1 students or any first-year student as much as some instructors pointed out, EAL learners may be particularly challenged by understanding and completing the tasks of genre and rhetorical analysis.

Despite commenting on Chinese EAL learners' oral and written performance, instructors also indicated that what some Chinese EAL students need is to learn how to make strategic use of available resources since they already work very hard. In the interview, the director of the AWE program also specified some EAL learners "do not always follow up what is available to them" (November 18, 2019). Dir further explained that some instructors reported to her that they needed to walk their EAL students to the Writing Center for help or to ask students to visit their office hours in order to provide them with support. Dir also pointed out some EAL students may set unrealistic goals for their composition courses such as obtaining an A or A-. In contrast, Dir and most instructors suggest EAL learners set meaningful and realistic goals for their studies such as, "I have learned strategies for reading something difficult" (Interview, November 18, 2019). Having discussed what students and instructors perceived as the main challenges that Chinese EAL learners had faced in different interactive situations, the following section will further discuss how the perceptions between instructor and student participants are both similar and different with each other.

4.3 Seeing Eye to Eye: A Comparison of Perspectives

Based on the above discussion and analysis, an examination and comparison of multiple perspectives could help towards a fuller understanding of Chinese EAL learners' needs and challenges in academic writing practices. In the following section, I first synthesize overlapping perspectives on students' challenges. Then I focus particularly on the blind spots in each group, which reveals a discrepancy between EAL students' expectations and what composition instructors intend to provide. The identified blind spots also have pedagogical implications.

4.3.1 Overlapping Perceptions on the Main Writing Challenges

There was much overlap in the challenges of academic writing identified by the instructors and student participants, which indicated the two groups were aware of students' current situations:

First, instructors and students all mentioned EAL students' challenges around speaking in classroom activities, such as group discussion. From the perspectives of students, most of them were willing to engage in oral discussions but were hindered by their lack of confidence in English fluency and familiarity with classroom conventions in a new environment. Showing empathetic understanding toward students' struggles, instructors also commented on students' lack of oral involvement in class and showed their support for accommodating students' transitional needs. During the process of taking their courses, students also demonstrated positive changes with regard to their oral language capacities as they became accustomed to the procedures and rules, which was demonstrated in the increased confidence among participants who were more engaged in classroom activities, although they occasionally struggled to understand their peers in informal situations. Considered from both an ecological approach and language socialization theories, the nature of EAL students' challenges in oral discussion can be identified as temporary and could be improved when they socialized themselves into the academic practices by interacting with others such as instructors or peers in the situated environment.

Second, both groups cited the challenges presented by academic reading in their composition course. Most instructors specified that Chinese EAL learners in their classes struggled with reading comprehension. They indicated that the reading materials were more complicated than what students had read before, and it might take time for EAL students to practice reading with speed and efficiency. From the perspective of the students, all the participants reported having difficulties completing their academic reading within time constraints, reading articles of various types, or reading others' perspectives critically.

Students who had a self-perceived good command of English, such as Gu or Zoey, also indicated they felt pressure regarding reading quickly and grasping the main ideas for complicated readings. In particular, most students noted that they spent too much time completing their readings but improved at a slow pace. Their struggles with reading were identified as persistent throughout the whole semester and did not improve dramatically within that short period of time. When asked how they perceived their developments in reading, students reflected they felt they were slowly progressing, but still felt challenged for the above-identified difficulties. Thus, in terms of academic reading issues, both instructors and EAL learners have acknowledged students' difficulties in managing the complexities of assigned readings.

Additionally, both students and instructors in this study shared similar ideas on the difficulty among EAL students in interpreting and negotiating the academic conventions and course requirements. From the perspectives of students, most of them seemed unaware of the purpose and interconnection of each assignment that they were required to complete. As Gu commented, he needed to reorient his efforts to each assignment since each one was new to him. Due to the unfamiliarity with academic conventions, students in this study felt pressured to compose and complete their writing assignments. Such pressure became even more pronounced when the instructions on certain assignments were implicit or unclear to the participants. From the instructors' perspective, they recognized EAL learners struggle with written assignments such as genre analysis. According to the instructors' explanation, due to the complexities and varied interpretations of academic genres, EAL learners might feel perplexed and uncertain in completing the assignment of genre analysis. Furthermore, the reason that accounts for the confusion among students was complex. It might not be an issue only on the students' end, but probably from both parties, as the AWE director indicated:

When a certain percentage of students got [the assignment] wrong, we should realize it was confusing in the way it was worded. I think some of us with writing assignments should really throw the assignment out. It may not be the students, or we should at least revise the questions. (Interview, November 18, 2019)

As Dir openly and honestly reflected, some instructors may not be well prepared for students' difficulties in interpreting the writing requirement. Therefore, it is necessary for instructors to make the teaching purpose explicit and clear to students, especially EAL learners. Similarly, some instructors also suggested making revisions on the design of writing assignments, with consideration of EAL learners' confusion and struggle. Further pedagogical suggestions will be discussed in the Chapter of Summary and Discussion.

4.3.2 Differences: Blind Spots in Each Group

Despite overlapping recognition of Chinese EAL learners' main challenges in FYC courses, AWE program administrators, composition instructors, and students seem to hold unique perceptions, depending on their situated positions. The AWE program director and coordinators for FYC courses, situated from a broader context, indicated that EAL learners are not the only group who struggle with academic writing. Also, the administrators recognized that institutional factors impacted EAL students' experiences. For instance, some institutional rules and criteria, such as the final examination (as an exit criteria) may disadvantage learners. From the perspectives of composition instructors, they were positive and empathic toward EAL learners' challenges. However, due to institutional and other limitations, they were constrained in their ability to accommodate EAL students' individualized needs in practical situations. In most cases, they tended to comment on EAL students' performance and written products more from the position of an evaluator or judge. Recognizing the importance of academic writing, EAL student participants in the current study provided detailed information regarding their needs, challenges and progress.

Meanwhile, students may remain unaware of the contextual factors and how their writing experiences were impacted by these factors. Therefore, the perspectives of students and composition faculty support and complement each other and also reveal some blind spots in each group.

4.3.2.1 Faculty Blind Spot #1: Unawareness of EAL Student' Prior Writing Experiences

In this study, the analysis of both the surveys and interviews showed that composition faculty were unaware of or knew little about EAL students' prior writing experiences. Instructors felt it was either unnecessary or difficult to learn about students' previous writing experiences. For example, the director of AWE program mentioned that the educational system in China were too complex for her to understand, although she tried to learn more about it. Additionally, an instructor mentioned she felt it was unnecessary to learn about the programs or experiences students had previously attended since she thought the related information are too complicated and the present classroom are very diversified. Most instructors in this study admitted they knew little about students' background information and previous writing experiences.

It is understandable that instructors may feel constrained to holistically understand a diverse group of students due to the big class size and their heavy workloads. In contrast, the perceptions and practices of student participants in this study showed they were eager to connect with their instructors by sharing their background information and concerns for their academic writing. This study also presented how the differences in students' prior high school experiences played a critical role in their academic performance. For instance, students who had graduated from international high schools in China differed greatly in their oral fluency and abilities to adapt to their in academic environment, despite encountering similar difficulties in writing for academic purposes. In fact, understanding students' previous learning experiences, such as whether students attended ESL or EAP classes, and their

understanding of academic expectations was helpful for instructors to contextually frame their perceptions toward EAL students and identify appropriate ways support students. Since instructors may find asking students' identity and other background information is inappropriate, as shown by survey results (see Additional comments in Table 4.2), they could learn more about students' prior writing experiences by indirect means, such as using writing prompts or inviting volunteer students to instructor themselves in small groups. From LS perspective, instructors could socialize students into expected writing practices by engaging them with authentic activities and connecting EAL students with previous knowledge and resources they have already equipped with. Therefore, instructors are suggested to learn more about EAL students' previous writing experiences and pedagogically support them in the transitional period of first-year composition studies.

4.3.2.2 Faculty Blind Spot # 2: Underestimating EAL Students' Affective Need to Connect with Instructors and Peers

In this study, most composition faculty seemed unaware of EAL students' needs to connect academically and affectively with instructors and NES peers. Although two instructors mentioned they tried to pair EAL students with NES in small groups to create a safe place for EAL students to speak up, they rarely acknowledged and identified EAL students' emotional pressure who constantly compare themselves to their NES peers. Even though students desire "affective support" from instructors, instructors are clearly not responsible (or usually trained) for meeting students' mental health needs. However, as students' academic performance and mental health issues cannot be separated, it would be beneficial if instructors could refer students to appropriate services, especially when students explicitly express their need for help. As Zappa-Hallman (2007) has shown, EAL students expected academic and affective support from their learning environments. In this study, all student participants expressed their expectations to connect with their instructors and NES

peers within and beyond their classroom environments. For instance, Zoey and Serena appreciated cooperative writing activities and peer review activities, although they felt that the time to communicate with their peers was limited.

Furthermore, most student participants reported that they felt their communication with instructors was constrained, with only one student reporting to have benefited from interactions with her instructor. This inability to communicate well with instructors seemed to be a source of students' frustration and confusion in their academic writing development. For example, as the only EAL learner in his class, Young felt invisible in classroom activities and unwelcomed by his instructor. Similarly, MoMo and Gu felt dissatisfied with the limited written feedback provided by their instructors. Their attempts to ask for further clarifications on their written work were also less attended to by either their instructors or tutors. In the academic socialization process, MoMo was upset and believed herself to be an incompetent learner through inefficient interactions with her instructor.

As the surveys and interview data showed, instructors provided similar feedback to all learners, including EAL students. Some instructors in this study also believed attending to EAL learners' language needs (such as, grammar knowledge and uses) for academic writing was beyond the scope of their teaching role. Due to class-size and heavy workload, instructors were also constrained to provide face-to-face opportunities for EAL students to ask for individual help. In this situation, EAL learners' affective needs were fully recognized by composition instructors. As Hu (2010) indicated, only providing feedback to EAL learners without face-to-face communication is not enough. Importantly, face-to-face conferences have at least two potential benefits: providing an opportunity for questions and explanations and enhancing student motivation to improve their writing practices. From an ecological approach view, language learning is emergent, situational, and relational to the affordances in the learning environment. EAL learners would significantly benefit from feedback provided

by their writing instructors if EAL students were given the chance for a one-on-one meeting and opportunities for language socialization.

4.3.2.3 Students' Blind Spot # 1: Failure to Appreciate their Progress and Contributions

In this study, instructors mentioned that EAL learners had enriched the classroom environment by bringing different learning experiences and perspectives. However, student participants tended to devalue their perspective and experiences and failed to acknowledge their progress when navigating their compositional trajectories. Commenting that EAL learners should be regarded as an “asset” rather than a problem, the director of the AWE program advocated valuing the multiple resources that EAL students bring to the classroom. She illustrated that Chinese EAL students in her class usually do quite well if they are allowed to write about topics that are interesting to them or about issues they already know. However, she also observed that EAL learners might be unaware that their perspectives or stories could be of interest to others. Another instructor, Stephen, who had eight Chinese students in his class, spoke highly of these students for bringing refreshing contents for peer-editing topics related to China. He also confirmed that their contributions to classroom activities were as good as NES students in the classroom situation, such as peer-editing. In contrast to instructors who took a balanced perspective toward EAL learners' strengths and struggles, students in this study tended to devalue themselves by following what they perceived their instructor expected them to write, thereby setting aside their own experiences.

4.3.2.4 Students Blind Spot # 2: Limited Access to Learning Affordances

Although student participants engaged with various resources to improve their academic writing, their access to the learning affordances was relatively limited. For example, some students might only seek one-on-one writing tutoring at the Writing Center but did not attempt to explore the full-range of resources offered, such as writing-related

workshops or peer-reviewed activities. Particularly at the early stage of enrolling in FYC courses, most participants felt overwhelmed by the new writing tasks and mainly focused their attention on the course content and assignments. The interview data showed that most participants developed their agency, mainly in response to the challenges they encountered, which manifested in their hesitation to seek help beyond their classrooms. At the beginning stage, nevertheless, only one participant, Young, visited the Writing Center for tutoring help. Other participants also enacted their learner agency in different ways but almost at the point when their first assignment was marked. As the AWE program director specified in the interview, “some EAL learners do not always follow up what is available to them” (November 18, 2019). Some instructors also reported that they needed to walk their EAL students to the Writing Center for help or ask students to visit their office hours to support them. Real learning happened when EAL learners could both develop awareness and take action on the learning affordances from an ecological perspective. Meanwhile, students’ descriptions of their challenges and needs showed they tended to position themselves as inferior to native English-speaking peers and withdrew from involving themselves in classroom activities. Therefore, it is critical for EAL learners to fully access the possible resources at an early time to improve their writing performance, given constraints or opportunities in practical situations.

4.4 Summary

This chapter explored the writing trajectories of six Chinese EAL students in the context of their FYC courses and was able to identify some challenges these students experienced. Coupled with faculty perceptions, the findings highlight areas that composition instructors can focus on that may be overlooked to accommodate EAL students’ needs in a classroom environment. Specifically, this chapter affirms what has been written about the main writing challenges that EAL students face in composition courses, such as difficulties in

reading and critical thinking (e.g., Siczek, 2014; Stuart, 2012), but draws attention to the frustration students felt when trying to negotiate the course expectations and academic conventions that go beyond language proficiency. Students' academic and emotional stress in taking their FYC courses due to unfamiliarity with the new academic environment and feeling isolated also add nuance to what has been described as "shyness" in classroom participation. Additionally, the findings that students felt inferior and disadvantaged compared with their peers highlight the need to enhance peer communication and create language development opportunities for EAL students in course curriculum design. Coupled with faculty perceptions, the findings highlight that composition instructors may underestimate EAL students' emotional needs related to seeking academic support. The next chapter will focus on exploring in-depth the impacting factors from the learning context at macro-meso-micro levels, which shaped and co-constructed Chinese EAL learners' holistic experiences.

Chapter 5. Beyond English Language Proficiency: Exploring Impacting Factors on EAL Learners' Academic Writing Practices and Socialization Experiences

Having discussed the main academic writing needs and challenges in FYC courses from the perspective of composition faculty and Chinese EAL learners, the following section explores factors that impact the writing trajectories of EAL learners. Drawing from an ecological framework on analyzing context from macro-meso-micro levels (DFG, 2016; Duff, 2019), I examine the crucial factors that impact EAL students writing trajectories within and across various levels concerning the local context. As portrayed by the framework of the Douglas Fir Group (DFG, 2016), there are lists of factors impacting SLA, which are organized into three analytical levels: (a) macro-level of ideological structure. For example, the public discourse or policy may prioritize which language(s) to be used; (b) meso-level of sociocultural institutions and community such as family or school featured with factors including identity and agency; (c) micro-level of social interaction impacting individuals, including their “semiotic resources.” From a social dimension, Duff (2019) further adds a dimension of time and space to the original model and suggests that language socialization approach to SLA would be helpful to identify the factors across macro-meso-micro levels since they are interrelated, as cutting slices across those three layers. Ecologically, the factors or issues identified by both composition faculty and EAL students in this study reflected the contextual constraints or opportunities at institution, program, and instructor levels in accommodating EAL learners’ needs.

In the following section, I discuss and present six main aspects that play a crucial role in EAL learners’ writing trajectories within and across macro-meso-micro levels of multilingual learning context related to student participants: monolingual norms and deficit discourse toward EAL learners; misalignment between advocacy of International Plan and EAL students’ lived experiences; discrepancy between Admission Policy and AWE program

requirements; instructors' lack of training and equipped resources; EAL students' limited access to classroom learning affordances; and the gaps between EAL learners' academic preparation and FYC course requirements. Ecologically, the interplay of these factors may differ in their impacts on individual learners and change in a dynamic manner. I highlight the role played by these dynamically interconnected factors in shaping and co-constructing students' writing practices and socialization experiences.

5.1 Monolingual Norms and Deficit Discourse toward EAL Learners

In a broad sense, monolingual norms and deficit discourse toward EAL learners in Canadian higher education may constitute the principal factor of the macro-level context. According to DFG (2016) framework, language learning is conceptualized in a global multilingual educational context. At the macro-level, social constructs, including ideological structures such as belief systems or cultural values, impact SLA. Although Canadian campuses have become linguistically and culturally diversified, EAL students are mostly evaluated by monolingual norms and viewed from a deficit discourse (Marshall, 2020; Surtees, 2019). As Marshall (2020) indicated, since “students are assessed by monolingual, formal academic English” (p. 145), there might be unsolved tensions between instructors and EAL learners in certain Canadian university settings. Furthermore, although instructors may encourage students to use other languages as learning tools, they also tend to frame their pedagogical practices around a prevalent institutional ideology that views EAL learners as deficit (Marshall, 2020). Such monolingual norms and deficit views toward EAL learners are also manifested with different nuances in this study.

This present study's findings showed an increased tolerance and potential prejudice toward EAL learners, which reflected language diversity and belief systems. When conducting interviews with instructors, I particularly paid attention to the language that they used to describe EAL learners, how they responded to their “errors,” “written accent,” and

treatment of students' use of other languages in classroom activities, in order to see how instructors frame their pedagogical practices and responses around language diversity. When talking about Chinese EAL learners, for instance, Stephen shared his observation and perceptions:

Jing: Do you find Chinese EAL students in your class stay together?

Stephen: Yes, they do. They speak their languages when they are in peer feedback, and they tend to gravitate toward each other. I found that Asian students who are not Chinese also gravitate together for some reasons in groups?

Jing: Are you okay with it?

Stephen: I am okay with it. I didn't try to separate them. It may also be helpful for them to have a native speaker look at their prose or whatever. But whatever works.

(Second Interview, December 18, 2019)

As elaborated by Stephen, most instructors also showed their tolerance towards using other languages in class activities such as peer review or small group discussion. Compared to diversified oral communications, composition instructors also expressed their perceptions of the so-called "written accent" of EAL learners. When EAL learners fail to smoothly express their ideas, they are usually described as having a "written accent" (Zawacki et al., 2007). In this study, one instructor illustrated that "the writing style that is different from Canadian English" can be viewed as having a "written accent." The director of the AWE program also elaborated on this concept with specific examples:

It just isn't the way that a native speaker would say it. So, for example, as a native speaker would say, he quits smoking. But a non-native speaker might say he has stopped smoking. No native speaker would ever say he has stopped his smoking, but it's perfectly comprehensible, and it's grammatically correct. And in some ways, it

actually even gets at a wonderful nuance, like verb tense, agency and possession that communicates some things that are kind of wonderful.

(Interview, November 8, 2019)

As shown, Dir held an open attitude toward students' "written accent" and felt that it conveys useful information about EAL students as writers. Additionally, instructors reported they usually evaluated students' writing in the context of extended essays with holistic consideration of the flow of ideas, logic, arguments, and organization. Similar to Dir's comments, Iris believed a "written accent" is part of EAL students' identity. She also found a variety use of word choice is "cool" when she asked students to explain what they mean by using certain words. Although instructors in this study also show their understanding toward EAL students who used their first language in classroom discussion and their accented written languages, the monolingual and formal academic writing is the norm of FYC courses and cannot be changed in current situation, which is aligned with the study by Marshall (2020).

Despite an increased patience and tolerance toward a variety of ways of speaking and writing English that was observed by Iris and Stephen who compared the differences between their previous teaching environment and the current one, the "intolerance" or "impatience" among some instructors who tended to treat EAL learners unfavourably cannot be overlooked as well. A good illustration of how EAL learners might be unfavourably treated was the following interview excerpt. In the survey answers, instructor Iris commented, "EAL learners might be potentially prejudiced by some instructors." She further explained her ideas in the follow-up interview:

Jing: Would you please explain the "probable prejudice" you mentioned in the survey?

Iris: Yeah. I think there are lots of instructors who are in some way impatient, which I think is about the toxic culture of impermanent work. They've been overwhelmed and underpaid. They feel upset by doing extra work. The intolerance is mainly about the instructors doesn't know how to provide extra support with limited energy. That's my observation. (Interview, November 8, 2019)

As Iris pointed out, the “impatient” or “intolerant” state of instructors was closely related to instructors' working conditions. As indicated by the survey results, four out of six instructors in this study were sessional lecturers. Given the heavy workload, they were temporally constrained to provide EAL students with individualized support for their academic success. If they are forced to go into “survival mode,” as cited by an instructor, they may have little time or energy to produce tailored and thoughtful responses to students' emergent needs. This profound fatigue may also extend to native English speakers who require additional support.

In this study, the perceptions and performances of some student participants implied they were negatively socialized into isolated member of their academic community and felt discouraged to engage in their writing activities. For example, four out of six students felt unsatisfied with receiving limited written feedback from their instructors. Particularly, MoMo and Gu reported feeling frustrated when their request for individual support was almost ignored by their instructors. When I asked how she approached her instructor for help, MoMo replied, “I have not gone to his office anymore since the first time he gave me almost no feedback when I asked for suggestions for summary writing” (Second interview, December 17, 2019). In the second interview, Gu reported that he felt pressured to ask help individually when his instructor emphasized several times in class “everyone is equal with the time and opportunity in class activities and exams” (December 27, 2019). Accordingly, Gu and MoMo interpreted their instructors' message as their asking for help is unwelcomed.

5.2 Misalignment between Advocacy of International Plan and EAL Students'

Experiences

Despite some instructors in this study commented positively toward EAL learners, the campus environment may not seem as welcoming and positive as GBU's International Plan indicated. Issued in 2015, this International Plan defined the term internationalization, the principle, basic categories, and specific objective for implementing the plan. In this Plan, a major objective is to enhance international students' experiences by identifying international students' needs and integrating academic support and services specific to them. Working collaboratively with a group for supporting international students on campus, Dir found that international students in general (not just Chinese learners) reported that Canadian students on campus make them feel unwelcome and act unfriendly towards them. In order to encourage international students to share their experiences comfortably, Dir thought, the university should improve their services for international students, and the impact between EAL learners and campus diversity should be mutual:

I do think that part of the reason you want international students is because they bring different experiences. You [the university] don't bring international students because you want to turn them into the same eighteen-year-old who grew up playing hockey here in Canada (Interview, November 18, 2019).

Sharing similar ideas, two other administrators also believed that the university could "do more" to create an environment that would welcome international students as members of the academic community to encourage international students to share their experiences comfortably. Because an ecological perspective views context as socially constructed and dynamically negotiated within a web of relationships between students, instructors, and other environmental components, building such an environment with strengthened interactions with various agents is crucial for supporting EAL learners who are new to the academic and

sociocultural context. This finding echoed previous studies, such as Zhang and Zhou (2010) and Heng (2018) among others, which recommended that university authorities should make efforts to enhance intercultural and interpersonal communication, such as, organize activities involving both international students and domestic ones.

Promoted by the internationalization Plan, the institutional rules and facilities are supposed to be helpful and supportive for EAL learners; however, some of the criteria set for EAL learners were considered problematic by composition faculty and students in this study. For instance, the composition faculty believed that the Business and Economics program at GBU may not fully understand EAL learners' situations and needs when they set the benchmark related to COMP 100. As related documents show, the Business program in which a majority of Chinese students are enrolled requires a minimum passing grade in COMP 100 (76% mark for the continuation of courses in their major). Against this compulsory requirement, EAL students would need to retake the course if they received a grade lower than B-, despite the great efforts they devoted to this course. This was exemplified by the cases of MoMo and Steve in this study. Dir considered such requirement as problematic:

[A] student who, based on where they started, when they came in, the fact that they're going to wind up at the end of the term with a low C or middle C, is exceptional. And, it's a sign that they are working very hard. I mean, the work they're having to put in to get to that level is impressive. And I think with this level, they will actually be able to function relatively well in a lot of the other classes that they take. And with a lot of other writing assignments, but B-Com [the Business Major] doesn't care. (Interview, November 18, 2019)

In alignment with the director of AWE programs, some instructors also thought such a disciplinary requirement is not reasonably set and would add additional pressure on students,

with the result that students might have trouble focusing on and valuing what they are learning. In most cases, students' progress could not be easily measured by grades. From the composition instructors' perspective, the setting of such a benchmark means student progress does not count unless students cross it. It is worth noticing that, some writing intensive disciplines, such as Business, usually expect students to be equipped with the required writing skills for success in their program by setting a high benchmark for students' composition courses. Student participants in this study also expressed frustration by the criteria of passing the FYC course set by their discipline. Since FYC is set as a prerequisite for enrolling in other courses, they were given limited options in course registration. As MoMo recalled, "Although I received a passing grade, I need to retake this course and cannot register other courses in my discipline before I could obtain a required score of B-" (Second Interview, November 28, 2019). Despite the fact that many students may struggle with the high-grade expectations set by the discipline such as Business, EAL students are particularly challenged since they are faced with both learning to write and improving general language proficiency.

5.3 Discrepancy between Admission Policy and AWE Program Requirement

Given the underlying assumption of the AWE program was that students enrolled in mainstream courses should have almost native-like English proficiency, a discrepancy can be located between GBU's admission requirement for international students and the AWE program requirements for students who enrolled in FYC courses. According to the university website, the language requirements for admitting international students, which differ across disciplines, is an IELTS score of 6 or above. However, the cut-off IELTS score of 6 or 6.5 is not considered a reliable indicator by the AWE program for students' readiness to take the course. Dir elaborated on her point when addressing the issue of official tests for admission:

I can tell you that a student who is coming in at exactly the IELTS cut-off or exactly the TOEFL cut-off, is just exactly at the minimum level of grades. That is vastly over-represented among our F or D (mark range: 0-48; 49-59), probably seventy-five percent. That's what we are seeing. And that is predictable. And students therefore shouldn't necessarily be put in a position of having to make this choice. (Interview, November 18, 2019)

By using their internal data that implied a correlation between EAL students' performance in writing and lower scores in IELTS, Dir discussed that students who enrolled with a cut off score of IELTS or TOEFL are admissible to the university but may not be qualified to take AWE programs. Aligned with what Dir observed in GBU, a recent study by MacDonald (2019) also found "an IELTS of 6.5 overall does not seem to be an adequate score for most students to achieve academic success in an undergraduate university program" (p. 165). Linking to language proficiency, what is more uncertain is the correlation between language scores and students' academic success. As Dir noted in the interview, the standards for the language proficiency levels for university admissions across the province of BC vary widely, and "it seems no one is keeping good data about how admission standards do or do not correlate with actual students' success" (September 18, 2019). Therefore, the problematic nature of using IELTS as a primary measurement for admission and complexities of various standards for language tests impact EAL students' writing trajectories at meso-levels of learning contexts.

Another factor at the meso- level of university environment was related to the monolingual course assessment. In this study, some instructors, and almost all of the student participants, indicated that course assessment caused EAL learners' challenges in their composition courses. As required by COMP 100 courses, students should pass a final examination in order to pass the course. In order to pass this exam, students were required to

read an academic article of four or five pages, compose a summary, and do a genre or rhetorical analysis of that article with personal responses within a three-hour time frame. EAL learners are allowed to bring a dictionary that translates between English and one other language as long as there are no extraneous notes in the margin. Shown by the standardized syllabus, this exam accounts for twenty-five to thirty percent of the whole course grade. In terms of commenting on the final exam and its impact on EAL learners, all the instructors in my study thought this compulsory exam was difficult and put lots of pressure on EAL learners, as Iris reported:

None of us are happy to have a final exam. But it's the law right now. I have had a few students come to me and say they are worried about it. Obviously, it is very much about the ideas, not grammar. (Interview, November 8, 2019)

Although instructors observed most students might not do as well on the final exams as on other assignments at home due to compressed time for reading and writing, they also noticed that EAL learners did struggle more on this exam than they did on other assignments in the overall course because they cannot get outside support like from the Writing Center. Two instructors, Jan and Ann, mentioned that the Chinese EAL learners in their class did not do well in the final exam even though they passed the course. Therefore, the final examination set as an exit condition added pressure on EAL learners' writing journeys to thrive in their courses.

Resonating with instructors' observations, EAL students in this study also confirmed that they felt overwhelmingly challenged by taking the final exam. Participants reported that they could not fully express their ideas and manage the reading and writing tasks well with a balanced allocation of time and energy. Although they were allowed to bring a paper dictionary to the classroom, they found almost no time to look for unknown words.

For instance, both Young and Zoey were dissatisfied with their final exam performance and worried about their exam marks when we met for our second interview. Feeling “anxious and unexpected,” Young reported that he had fully prepared for the final exam by reading the given article intensively and searching for extra information online beforehand but felt he underperformed on the actual exam. He attributed the reasons to his feelings of nervousness and his inability to “find more clues for analysis”. Additionally, since he spent too much time reading the new article, Young found that he had to write his response in a rush without any extra time for building solid arguments or revising his writing. In addition to feeling nervous, Serena reported the final exam “does not make too much sense” for improving her academic writing practices since she cannot receive any detailed feedback but only the grade on it.

5.4 Instructors: Insufficient Resources and Lack of Training

In addition to the working situation of sessional instructors (as previously discussed), which may negatively impact students’ learning experiences, the findings in this study also found that instructors were not equipped well for accommodating EAL learners’ needs, although most of them reported being willing to provide support. At the institutional level, first, the current class sizes may prevent instructors from providing ideally individualized support and feedback to EAL students. As Dir pointed out, the maximum enrolment for running first-year writing courses should ideally be capped at twenty. But now, running with thirty students, it became hard for instructors to attend to students’ needs individually in the current composition classrooms, although “most students would benefit from having a one-on-one essay draft workshop with the instructor for at least one assignment per term” (December 27, 2019), as Dir specified in the interview. In addition to class size, some instructors indicated that there is also a question of expertise in training for them to work appropriately with EAL learners. As Jan noted in her comments, “Honestly, I don’t feel like I have adequate training in supporting EAL students to be their primary source of support or to

most effectively address their specific learning needs” (December 28, 2019). Although Jan tried to provide guidance to EAL learners and referred them to various resources on campus, she still thought EAL specialists were more capable of supporting their needs. Jan also mentioned that she had attended workshops and training related to working with students with special needs, but almost no professional training on working with EAL learners:

The training itself doesn’t seem to be readily available. I feel like, as an institution, our university does less in supporting instructors to help EAL students. It is strange because we have lots of Chinese students. I feel like that more could be doing for that.
(Interview, December 17, 2019)

As a new instructor, Jan hoped she could obtain more professional training related to teaching and supporting EAL learners in her writing class, especially those coming from China. Jan’s doubts were shared by other instructors in this study. Additionally, Dir pointed out that some instructors who are used to working with native English-speaking students may feel less comfortable and competent supporting EAL learners.

5.5 EAL Students: Limited Accessibility of Classroom Learning Affordances

At a micro-level of the dynamic FYC classroom environment, a theme that developed as a result of participants’ interviews was whether EAL students have sufficient access to the available academic resources. Especially in classroom context, EAL students’ interactions and engagements with the learning affordances plays a crucial role in their learning. As represented by the DFG (2016) framework of macro-meso-micro level of contexts, language learning begins at the micro-level of social activity, in which individuals develop their cognitive, emotional, and social capacities by interacting with others and engaging in resources and activities. Within the ecological space of FYC classrooms, EAL student learners in this study negotiated their academic experiences both in terms of their engagement with the course expectations and class activities and in terms of their interaction with

semiotic resources (such as textbooks, syllabus, in-class written assignments, assigned readings) and other agents (course instructors, peers, or writing tutors). In this section, I discuss two kinds of interactions: interactions between EAL students and composition instructors, between EAL students and peers in the classroom environment, which played a crucial role in shaping and co-constructing EAL students' negotiated experiences in academic writing and their academic discourse socialization process.

5.5.1 Interactions with Composition Instructors

Among the interactions and engagements with different agents, the teacher-student relationship is critical to understand the dynamic interactions and engagements at the micro-level of context. As the DFG (2016) further argued, the impact of instructors on learners is considerable since teachers normally can “determine the types of activities and resources to which learners will be given access and the opportunities they will have to engage in the activities...” (p. 33). Given the focus of this study is to understand EAL learners' writing issues and trajectories within the context of this case study, I do not attempt to discuss in-depth the pedagogy of FYC courses. However, as instructors' teaching approaches may closely relate to the ways that they perceive and act on EAL issues (Ferris et al., 2011), I asked instructors questions (both in surveys and in interviews) about their course expectations, their requirements for various assignments, the types and focus of the written feedback they provide, as well as their comments and suggestions for EAL learners. Instructors' pedagogical responses helped me understand how they perceived the specific needs of EAL learners and how their pedagogical design of activities may impact EAL learners' academic engagement and performance.

One important factor was how the instructors provided either oral or written feedback to EAL students. With regard to instructors' written feedback practices, the findings showed there were a variety of styles and patterns in terms of how they responded to EAL learners'

written assignments. The survey findings showed that instructors tended to offer similar comments and feedback to all students (shown in Table 4.2) but may accommodate EAL learners' needs to varying degrees. For example, in order to provide help to the Chinese EAL students in her class, Iris encouraged them to bring their draft version and set a schedule to meet with her before the due date, but found not every student took this opportunity. Such a face-to-face meeting opportunity has proven beneficial for EAL students in improving their writing practices (Hu, 2010).

The patterns of instructors' responses to their EAL learners through written feedback can be further understood when referring to the four types of instructors' attitudes identified by Ferris et al. (2011), who investigated mainstream writing instructors' perspectives and responses to L2 writers in their classroom. According to their findings, instructors vary greatly in their perceptions and attitudes, which range from being unaware of and providing no specific guidance or resources to showing "nuanced understanding" of L2 writers and their written texts, and providing extra attention and individual support in "a sensitive, individualized, and context-specific" way (p. 222). In particular, the authors found that the provided feedback tended to be exclusively language-based if the instructors emphasized their writing class was not "ESL" sections. What I found in this study, accordingly, was that instructors did show similar patterns of providing feedback and comments on students' assignments, but also differed with each other due to contextual and professional constraints. Most instructors were aware of some specific needs of EAL students, but choose to provide the same written (oral) feedback to all students although some instructor reported they may send EAL students the resources about COMP 100, the Writing Center, and resources related to International Student Services.

As indicated by prior literature on language socialization and written feedback, EAL students may feel frustrated when the feedback they receive on their academic writing is

insufficient (e.g., Anderson, 2020a; Duff, 2010). In this study, from students' perspectives, the similar cases of Gu and MoMo present their dissatisfaction when the feedback they received was less than they expected. During our second interview, Gu described the feedback he received either in oral or written form as almost "none." He explicitly expressed that he was dissatisfied with the absence of instructor comments on the content of his ideas:

He provided less feedback to tell the truth. He usually said, please see my comments. He seldom talked about what kind of big ideas are missing but only circle some grammatical mistakes or formatting issues. Even with the research paper, I got 80 percent of the total marks. When I asked about losing twenty percent of my grades, I got no comments on that. With my rhetorical analysis, he told me to correct all the pronounced and basic mistakes, but without giving any suggestions on big ideas.
(Second interview, December 19, 2019)

Rather than merely receiving a suggestion on modifying his grammar mistakes, what Gu hoped to gain was some individual attention and suggestions on his written work. Given the course syllabus and related documents that Gu showed me, I found no explicit information on the rubrics of assessment for each assignment, only some general marking categories. It is understandable why Gu felt the vagueness of guidance and specific criteria of requirements hindered him from further improving his writing practice. Another student, MoMo, showed me some assignments with written feedback from her instructor. Of the eight pages of a research paper, her instructor only wrote one sentence comment: "A highly effective research paper overall. C+." When we discussed her thoughts on receiving this comment, MoMo expressed that she was a bit disappointed not because of the grade she received but because she felt her efforts were not "seen" by her instructor.

Drawing on a second language socialization framework, scholars such as Anderson (2020a) argue that written feedback can influentially function as a literacy practice by

socializing students' variable stances and positionalities. For MoMo, the vague feedback she received appears to have contributed to her marginalization within her composition class, causing her to feel mistreated, and unwilling to get involved in other socialization opportunities that might have improved her language proficiency, writing capacities, and sense of connection to her academic community.

In fact, instructors' written feedback plays a critical role in students' academic socialization processes, which could be exemplified by the contrasted cases of Gu and Emily. Differing dramatically from the frustrated experiences of MoMo and Gu, Emily enjoyed a dialogic interaction with her instructor in terms of the written feedback she received. As Emily described several times during the two rounds of interviews, her instructor helped guide her through the process of crafting a research paper with clear instructions and always served as a resource for her inquiries either through email exchanges or written feedback on her assignments. Emily's instructor's feedback was also explicit and directive, with a focus on the writing content, logic of ideas, grammar issues, word use, and citation. Upon the agreement of Emily's instructor, I selected part of her comments as an illustration here. Below is an example of her instructor's feedback on one of her assignments:

Emily, I love your ideas, and I am super excited to learn about your topic! You clearly state what you want to research, what you already know about your topic and what you still need to research. You also ask specific and relevant research questions that address multiple aspects of your topic-this is good. Keep asking these sorts of questions as you research...The strongest research paper acknowledges the nuances of complex ideas and engages with opposing perspectives (usually to refute them), and I am confident that you will be able to write a strong research paper... (Feedback on Emily's Research Paper, Mark 78/B+)

Compared to the almost non-existent (or minimal) feedback that Gu and MoMo received from their instructors, Emily felt lucky to receive detailed and encouraging feedback from her instructor. Accordingly, her instructor socialized her into expected writing practices and academic conventions and a positive affective stance, which played a critical role in motivating her further actions. Feeling encouraged and motivated, Emily involved herself actively in the interactive process by asking questions, incorporating editing advice, and revising her drafts according to her instructor's constructive comments and suggestions. The interactions between EAL students and composition instructors can play a critical role in shaping students' experiences, as manifested in the written feedback or comments they receive from their instructors. Written feedback therefore has both an academic and emotional impact on students' writing experiences, and plays a formative role in their broader academic discourse socialization experiences (see also Anderson, 2020a; Bronson, 2004; Séror, 2008).

5.5.2 Interactions with Native English Speaking Peers

From a language socialization perspective, EAL students' interactions with other agents such as peers also play a crucial role in their academic socialization process. At the micro-level of classroom interactions and activities, findings of student surveys and interviews also demonstrated they have limited access to learning opportunities, especially the interactions with NES peers in classroom settings. Although EAL learners are immersed in English medium environments, their access to meaningful exposure and learning opportunities for language and academic studies cannot be taken for granted (Duff, 2019; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). Due to social, institutional, or other factors that were previously explored, the experiences of some student participants showed they had limited access to learning affordances in either formal classroom situations or informal contexts. In this study, some student participants shared their confusion, despair, or frustration toward

constrained access to learn and use English and interact with their classmates. Young, for instance, indicated the chances to communicate with his classmates were not ample when asked about how he interacted with his academic peers:

Very little. There is not so much chance to communicate with them in class time.

Even though there is one or two peer-reviewed activity, I don't feel it is quite helpful for me with my writing improvements. I admire one of my Chinese friends since his instructor is so nice and encouraging. I wish to change into her class but was told too late to do it. (Second interview, December 8, 2019)

In addition to having a constrained opportunity to socialize with classmates, Young seems not to enjoy the peer-reviewed activity since he believed it was not beneficial for his writing. However, the claim that Young attributed the reasons to his unsupportive instructor might also show his lack of agency or inability to use available resources for his own needs. Regarding peer review, research on second language socialization indicates that peer support and networks play a critical role in EAL learners' academic and social experiences, and peers can function as very powerful agents in the process of (co)socialization (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). In practical classroom situations, however, EAL learners may be limited from such opportunities for peer socialization due to external and internal factors. Unlike Young, Gu valued the opportunity of peer review but felt frustrated by limited access to it. The following interview extract depicts how Gu composed his research paper, with almost no guidance and peer support opportunity:

Jing: Are there any peer-reviewed opportunities for your research paper?

Gu: No, there is none. It is a bit weird since there is one time for peer-reviewing with the assignment of rhetorical analysis, but not with this one (research paper). I don't know why.

Jing: Have you been given any model or template during the process?

Gu: I've received one example. Since the topic and format are quite different, I don't think it contributed to my own writing.

Jing: Were you asked to submit an outline for your research paper?

Gu: No, the professor asked us to hand in the topic. He approved of my topic and only suggested that I should narrow it down. During the two weeks of writing, we can go to the library or write on our own. We were given no feedback or instruction during the process. (Second interview, December 19, 2019)

Although Gu's case might be a bit extreme, his frustrating experience illustrates the impact of an unsupportive classroom environment on an EAL learner who has a high English capacity and positive learning attitude. In contrast to Gu's unfavourable experiences, some students who have access to peer activities reported that they gained a sense of mutual interactions and improved their adaptation in both classroom environments and even during after-class communication. Serena reported that she was understood and supported by her NES classmates, who gave full respect to her opinions in the group discussions. Emily and MoMo also noted that their NES peers helped them understand the course readings and gave them constructive suggestions on their written drafts in peer editing activities. Therefore, having access to interactions with their instructor and peers and learning how to utilize such resources is critical for EAL learners' academic experiences.

5.6 A Gap between EAL Students' Previous Writing Experiences and Current Course Expectations

A salient theme related to the causes of accounting for EAL learners' writing challenges was an apparent gap between students' academic preparation and current course requirements, which was identified by both composition faculty and students. In both the survey and the follow-up interview, the AWE program director mentioned this gap as the main factor impacting Chinese EAL students' writing challenges. Sharing similar views,

other instructors also indicated that some students lack academic writing and reading experiences for taking the first-year composition courses. As some instructors commonly agreed, such a gap might apply to any first-year student, including NES with different high school experiences in academic writing, but likely to a differing degree.

One indicator that instructors employed to examine whether students are prepared for taking COMP 100 is an internal diagnostic essay. Since the admission criteria at the university level is varied, and the cut-off grades of some exams are considered only partially reliable, instructors have taken some internal approaches to check on students' preparedness for taking the course. As a standard course syllabus described, students in COMP 100 are required to take a diagnostic test at the beginning of each semester. Instead of giving students a random topic to write about, they were usually given a newspaper editorial to read, which is not culturally specific and carefully selected by the instructors or AWE program. Students were required to summarize the editorial and write a response expressing how they agree or disagree with it. To clarify the efficiency of the diagnostic test in predicting students' readiness, Dir shared with me departmental statistics:

Among those who rated as not ready, fifty percent of them do not finish the term. They wind up withdrawing from the class, dropping the class at some point, so that fifty percent of them just don't finish the class of that other fifty percent, half of them fail. And the other half pass most commonly with a D, although there are some Cs (Interview, November 18, 2019)

What Dir emphasized was that the diagnostic test is a reliable signal for predicting student academic preparation. Students did not have direct access to the diagnostic result. However, those students (mostly EAL students) who were considered not ready to take COMP 100 would be recommended to take COMP 099 or register in COMP 100 later. Nevertheless, students are able to make their own decision on whether to drop the course or

remain in the classroom. Moreover, linking back to the IELTS cut score that was previously discussed, Dir added that “those who have only written five paragraphs for maximally two hundred and fifty words are not considered as being ready” (Interview, November 8, 2019). She further explained that some Chinese EAL learners, who are struggling with the course, demonstrate they are not ready to take AWE courses due to a lack of related writing experiences:

But I also have had students from China... they’ve said the only English language instruction they really had is IELTS preparation. Those students are not ready to be in an AWE class. They simply are not. They have not done enough writing. (Interview, November 18, 2019)

In addition to the diagnostic test, some instructors (such as Dir and Ann) also invited students to answer self-assessment questions such as, “Have you ever written a research essay before? How many pages have you written on a topic?” The self-assessment shows that students who are not doing research papers for the first time are more successful than others. Dir added, they (instructors) do not expect students to have done summary writing, quoting, or paraphrasing perfectly, but “if students literally never had a source and had to do something with it as part of their own arguments, it is going to be a very steep learning curve for them” (Interview, November 8, 2019). As pointed out by some instructors in the interviews, some EAL learners were especially challenged since they need to navigate various written assignments while learning to improve their language issues at the same time.

Moreover, the AWE program director and two instructors acknowledged that they knew little about the Chinese educational system. Dir mentioned she knew a bit about the *Gao Kao* system and *Maple Leaf* high school (a British Columbia curriculum offshore high school in China; see Alexander, 2019) and felt they are too complex to understand. Furthermore, instructors specified that they would not assume students’ readiness only by

their proficiency level or region. One factor they confirmed was that those who graduated from high schools with less demanding curricula, including those who had only written essays with two-hundred-words were not ready and would struggle with fulfilling the course requirement. In considering written assignments, instructors found essays submitted by Chinese EAL students were either too short or showed their difficulties in interpreting the course requirements. These are symptomatic of students' academic unpreparedness for taking COMP 100.

5.7 Discussion and Summary

This chapter reports on the findings of the factors that impact the academic writing trajectories of EAL learners in this study. Drawing from the DFG (2016) framework and language socialization perspectives (Duff, 2019), this chapter presented a range of interrelated factors within and across macro-meso-micro levels of FYC context shaped and constructed EAL learners writing practices and socialization experiences. At a broader macro-level, the monolingual norms and deficit academic discourse toward EAL learners were identified as crucial elements that shaped the perceptions and pedagogical responses of composition instructors and administrators at Canadian universities and EAL learners' ideas and actions in navigating their academic journey. As Duff (2019) emphasized, there is a dynamic interplay of these linking factors, and changes for a language learner will not happen without macro-meso-micro interconnections. In this study, although the construct of language ideology is identified as an impacting element at the macro-level, it also performed by instructors at a meso-level of university policies and micro-level of classroom environments.

At the meso-level of the institutions and programs, some discussed factors, including misalignment between admission policies and AWE program requirements, misalignment between the advocacy of International Plan and university structure, may potentially negatively impact EAL learners' experiences. These findings reaffirmed the unsolved

dilemma of adequately supporting EAL learners in the broader context of Canadian higher education (Anderson, 2015, 2020a; Surtees, 2019) and echoed the recommendations by related studies that the university authorities should make efforts to organize activities involving both international students and domestic ones to enhance intercultural and interpersonal communication (Heng, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). In addition to these institutional factors, instructors' limited resources, including heavy workload and lack of expertise and training in working with EAL learners, are also identified as critical components impacting EAL learners' academic socialization.

At the micro-level of social interactions, crucial elements include EAL students' interactions with instructors and engagement with peer-review activities. Findings showed that EAL students' negotiations with their academic writing are impacted mainly by their access or constraints to these learning affordances. Additionally, a gap between EAL learners' academic preparation and current course expectations is an influential factor for students' struggles beyond English language proficiency. As shown, EAL students would likely be better positioned to succeed if they were valued as resourceful with their unique perspectives and ideas, rather than viewed as deficient or demoralized as problems to be fixed. Influenced by these factors, the next chapter will focus on how student participants negotiated their academic socialization experiences, especially their self-directed socialization processes, by exerting learner agency.

Chapter 6. Becoming First-Year Academic Writers: The Agency and Resourcefulness of Chinese EAL Students

Having reported on the main writing challenges and needs in FYC courses by both Chinese EAL students and composition faculty, as well the impacting factors at the macro-meso-micro level of FYC context, this chapter presents findings on the fifth overarching question: how did students navigate their writing trajectories by seeking various types of support and resources both in and beyond FYC courses? I approach this question by addressing the following sub-set of questions: What resources could students access and how did they take advantage of them? Drawing from an ecological notion of “affordance” and “agency” (van Lier, 2008a) and informed by the theory of (second) language socialization (Duff, 2010; Duff & Anderson, 2015), this section examines the manifestations of learner agency among six Chinese EAL learners in FYC courses who engaged with various learning opportunities in order to manage the challenges for improving their academic writing.

In order to employ the notions of affordance and agency as theoretical constructs for this study, it is helpful to revisit these concepts briefly here. From an ecological view, affordance refers to the dynamic relationship between active language learners and their environment or the learning opportunities learners perceive to take action (van Lier, 2004; 2010). To perceive and act on the affordances in the learning environment requires the enactment of learner agency. According to van Lier (2008a), learner agency is defined as a learner’s capacity to act and a situated behaviour, which is “mediated by social, interactional, cultural, institutionally and other contextual factors” (p. 171). In recent years, there is also an increased research interest on the role of learner agency in language socialization. As a theoretical and methodological framework, LS shares compatible fundamental principles with an ecological perspective on viewing language learning as a social process and values the role of learner agency. The core of the LS theory premise is that novices learn linguistic or

cultural practices through interactions with more proficient users of that target language and culture (Duff, 2010). Adult EAL learners, in addition to external socialization with agents such as instructors, tutors, or peers, also tend to employ internal or self-directed socialization (Anderson, 2017). Such self-directed socialization processes mostly result from learners who enact their agency and interact with affordances from external and internal sources to which they are exposed (Duff & Doherty, 2015). In this sense, the socialization process for L2 adult learners is mutual, multi-directional, and complex in which the exertion of learner agency plays a crucial role. From the perspective of Complex Dynamics System Theory (CDST), Larsen-Freeman (2019) conceptualized learner agency as relational and emergent, emphasized agency is achievable, and discussed how to support learner agency by educational practices. These theoretical and pedagogical discussions related to learner agency provide rich insights into understanding the academic writing and socialization experiences of the EAL students in this study.

In this chapter, I report on four themes related to EAL learners' perceptions and academic practices in their socialization processes and writing trajectories: (1) evolved perceptions and experiences in taking FYC courses; (2) deepened understandings of academic writing concepts and conventions; (3) strengthened awareness of composing a strong argument; (4) enhanced learner agency in accessing learning affordances. In particular, I highlight the role of the learner agency in accessing multiple resources and in the process of self-directed socialization.

6.1 Evolved Perceptions and Practices in Taking FYC Courses

One purpose of this study was to learn how students characterize their experiences in FYC courses and how such perceptions can evolve upon completing their class. While taking their FYC courses, most participants' perceptions of their composition studies evolved along with their accumulated knowledge and gained skills, which is evident in their changed

accounts of their feelings toward their composition courses. With a focus on students' perceptions of interacting with their immediate environments at different points of time, ecological and language socialization perspectives help capture the nuanced changes in the process. In the initial stages of their composition classes, which was reflected mainly in the first set of interviews (as the second column shows in Table 6.1), all participants identified their experiences taking the course as challenging, and most of them felt hopeful that they could improve their academic writing by exerting effort near the end of their courses. Young described his feelings and practices of taking his COMP 100 class as "challenged, frustrated and anxious" (First Interview, September 18, 2019). Because of the gap between what Young expected initially and what he experienced in the actual FYC classroom environment, he tried to "figure out and manage everything" at the beginning of the semester. Other students also felt challenged to meet the course expectations to different extents. Overwhelmed by the complex readings and grammar quizzes, Zoey felt "time-consuming, challenged" and "self-motivated" to conquer all the difficulties.

Interestingly, MoMo used the words "stressed" and "relaxed" simultaneously to describe her feelings. She further explained that her NES classmates' oral fluency made her feel stressed; at the same time, she also felt quite comfortable communicating and interacting with others in an English environment. Similarly feeling "hopeful and challenged," Gu also realized the difference between previous high school learning and university studies by identifying his experience as learning to be "independent." In sum, students' initial descriptions of their learning in FYC courses were mostly represented as both challenging and hopeful.

By the end of the semester, students' perceptions and practices (as the third column shows in Table 6.1) had changed as they became more familiar with the academic environment and gained access to various resources. In responding to similar inquiries on

their feelings about taking COMP 100, most participants reported that they felt their composition class was helpful and that they were progressing, although some still felt stressed and worried about their final exams when the second round of interviews was conducted at the end of the semester. Among all of the participants, Emily was the most active and positive one. She described that she “felt a big success” for finally completing her research paper and was “fulfilled” with learning new and exciting things:

It is not a burden for me to write now. It is also like having a dialogue with the teacher by reporting what I am doing. It is amazing since I am not a writing person, but now, I feel there is always something new to learn from, and I am excited that I finally have it done. (Second interview, December 18, 2019)

Regarding her writing activity as “a dialogue” with her instructor, Emily utilized external and internal resources in her socialization process. Externally, Emily’s instructor socialized her into the expected academic writing practice for first-year students by scaffolding instruction and individualized support. Meanwhile, Emily socialized herself into the position of an emerging academic writer by learning from textbooks and interactive communications with her instructors and peers, an enactment of learner agency. Similar to Emily, Serena described her learning experience as “fun, supportive and helpful.” She also felt relieved since she had already finished her final examination and felt assured of passing the course with an ideal mark as she expected. Although not as excited as Emily and Serena, other participants also felt a sense of progress despite the struggles and difficulties they had gone through. For instance, Young felt “half-relieved,” and Zoey felt “a sense of learning” although they still worried about the result of their final examination.

By the end of their composition courses, three participants emphasized they felt learning to write was “interesting” or “fun” by the end of the semester. As Emily explained, she felt motivated and engaged with writing activities since taking the course. Her original

ideas that she was not good at writing also changed. Serena became more confident in writing academic papers and felt curious to discover more about it. Unlike other students, as table 6.1 shows, Gu used both “unsatisfactory and effective” to describe his mixed feelings about taking the course. He explained that he was frustrated by getting limited feedback from his instructors, which was similar to MoMo’s situation. Meanwhile, he believed his writing had effectively improved somewhat through his self-directed learning with devoted effort in seeking help outside the classroom, an enactment of agency upon his surrounding environment. Students’ different perceptions, in some ways, reflected their unique paths in navigating their academic writing practices and socialization experiences.

Table 6.1

Three words to describe the perception and experiences of students taking their FYC courses during their pre-study and post-study interview

Pseudonym	Words to describe their perceptions and experiences (pre-study)	Words to describe their perceptions and experiences (post-study)
Gu	Independent, Challenging, Hopeful	Challenging, time-consuming, effective
MoMo	Hard-working, Relax, Stressed	Progressing, Interesting, Challenging
Young	Challenging, Frustrated, Anxious	Anxiety, Half-relieved, Unexpected
Zoey	Challenging, Time-consuming, Self-motivated	Challenging, Unsure, A sense of learning
Emily	Challenging, useful, helpful	Fulfilled, Helpful, Interesting
Serena	Useful, worried, hopeful	Having fun, Supportive, Helpful

6.2 Deepened Understanding of Academic Writing Concepts and Conventions

Another theme that reflected students’ acquired sense of learning was an evolved and strengthened understanding of academic concepts and conventions by taking their

composition courses. Since students were in a transitional period, their understanding of academic writing was shaped by their previous learning experiences or writing in a more general sense at the point of entering the FYC context. In the first set of interviews, students reported they had written almost every day since arriving in Canada, mostly in daily emails. When asked about the main difference between daily writing and academic writing, most students similarly perceived academic writing and commented mainly on the standard features and structural format of writing essays (as the second column shows in Table 6.2). They reported that essay writing should follow formal rules and regulations in terms of word use and sentence structure. They also noted the essential components of an essay, such as a thesis statement or topic sentences in the introduction, body, or conclusion of an essay. Most students reported that they had previously written a five-paragraph essay with limited word totals at a maximum of five hundred. For instance, Emily related her perception of academic writing to her TOEFL training experiences in writing. Similarly, Young and Serena related their perceptions of COMP 100 to previous preparation for their bridging program. Additionally, Zoey indicated the need to include others' ideas as a reference when composing an essay. In short, students' descriptions and comments showed their limited exposure to academic writing practices both in English and their L1 of Mandarin Chinese.

When asked similar questions about how to understand academic writing by the end of the semester, students' descriptions of their learning process showed a more in-depth and improved understanding of what comprised academic writing and how to write in a suitably academic way, despite a few of them reporting they did not make noticeable progress. In general, students tended to comment on academic writing features by relating what they had learned in the process of completing written assignments, especially by composing their research papers. Compared to their responses to the same question posed at the beginning of the semester, it is evident that they were more aware of the rules and conventions for

academic writing; for instance, all students mentioned their citation style, such as using APA or MLA in their research paper, which was not noted by any participant in the first interview. For instance, Emily indicated that she knew nothing about citation rules before taking the course and learned to follow the rules when she needs to include others' ideas as evidence in her writing. By engaging with learning resources, EAL students in this study became socialized into academic writing conventions and practices expected of them in FYC courses.

6.3 Strengthened Skills of Composing a Strong Argument

By taking their composition courses, most students reported that they had learned the importance of making and composing a good argument by incorporating reasons and evidence from other authoritative sources, which is a core expected ability of FYC courses. For instance, Young reflected on what he learned: "I don't quite understand what an argument is before, and now I learn the process, and everything is related with each other for serving targeted audience and purposes" (Second interview, December 18, 2019). Similarly, Emily reported that she learned how to make strong arguments by applying the pattern of "a claim, grounding and warrant" to her writing, and she felt her writing was improved by following the instructor's guided process of how to write an argument and produce multiple drafts in her pilot section. With a deeper understanding of resource-based writing, MoMo indicated that she was good at analyzing the rhetorical patterns, intended audience, the purpose of assigned readings, and could include main arguments in her writing. Emphasizing the idea of "critical thinking," Zoey reported that she learned how to include different perspectives with her writing stance. Before taking COMP 100, she only knew how to argue for her ideas but could not integrate others' perspectives as resources.

Table 6.2

Students' evolving understanding of academic writing at the beginning and by the end of taking FYC courses

Pseudonym	Understanding of academic writing (beginning stage)	Understanding of academic writing (ending stage)
Gu	The use of words and the construction of sentences should follow certain rules.	It is evidence-based writing. I think academic writing is more structured compared to other forms of writing.
MoMo	Structured and should follow the rules; An essay includes introduction, body and conclusion. I also need to include one thesis statement and topic sentences in each paragraph.	I've learned how to write in APA style. I've learned to make an argument by including the evidence from reading articles.
Young	The formality and structured format	I thought the argument is important with consideration of the audience and purpose. It is a process of persuasion. For the writers, it is a process of how you could persuade your readers to accept your ideas. I also think there is a format for academic writing.
Zoey	I need to include references about what others are saying and add my opinions on that. I also need to write by abiding by a certain format.	The citation format and critical thinking
Emily	Similar to the core of TOEFL writing tests. I need to write topic sentences as the main ideas and include specific examples to support my ideas.	Academic writing should be clear, structured and comprise a good argument. I should also follow citation patterns and other rules.
Serena	It requires rules and regulations. I need to pay attention to the formality of word use and structure.	Follow the rules and citation style, and make a good argument

Students' evolved realizations on the importance of arguments and how to compose a good argument served as a forward step in their socialization process of academic writing practice, showing them to be more aware of the local practices of academic conventions rather than explicit rules and requirements. Most importantly, the ideas on "critical thinking"

or making “a claim” represented their engagement with their writing practices using a personal stance or voice, a critical step in negotiating their identities in academic writing. A summary of changes in each student’s perceptions and experience of their course and their evolving understanding of academic writing was shown in table 6.2.

6.4 Enhanced Learner Agency in Accessing Learning Affordances

The following discussion presents the enhanced learner agency that students displayed in drawing on academic support beyond classrooms, primarily how students’ enactment of agency functioned in their self-directed socialization processes, which were impacted by various factors discussed in the previous chapter. Four salient themes were derived by the data analysis regarding the manifestation of learner agency and resourcefulness in L2 academic socialization processes: adaptive alignment of awareness and action in accessing learning affordances, dynamic integration of past and present experiences, proactive building-up of support networks, as well as autonomous decision-making in navigating uncertainties. I highlight the role of the learner agency among EAL students in accessing multiple learning affordances through dynamic interactions and engagements with the environment across time and space.

6.4.1 Adaptive Alignment of Awareness and Action in Accessing Learning Affordances

In this study, most participants felt overwhelmed and challenged by the prospect of succeeding in their writing studies when entering into their FYC courses. As most participants proclaimed, “Everything was so new” to them. However, confronted with demanding expectations of English proficiency, complex assigned readings, and various writing assignments, most participants became aware of such challenges and proactively sought support from their surrounding environment. For example, when asked whether she had experienced challenges since her arrival, Zoey responded: “Yes, I almost met new things

every day. But I handle them well since I take them as opportunities to learn from” (First interview, October 8, 2019). As shown, Zoey seemed to recognize the challenges upon entering mainstream studies and actively aligned her actions with what she perceived as learning opportunities or “challenges” that she identified. According to an ecological perspective, once learners recognize that learning opportunities vary for different learners, they can begin to act on available resources. In the case of Zoey, her action of seeking resources by translating the assigned article from English to Mandarin Chinese aligned with her early awareness of the difficulties in comprehending complex academic readings. Despite spending a significant amount of time reading, Zoey reported that she could understand the articles at a deeper level utilizing translation. Furthermore, she also learned how to write by imitating the structure and rhetorical features of the assigned readings. Similarly, another participant, Young, initially sought help from his instructor and later adjusted his strategy when he recognized that his instructor was not available to provide the support he expected in his class:

I used to visit my instructor’s office time twice a week. However, later I decide not to go there to avoid misunderstanding. The writing centre is beneficial for my study. I asked questions from the tutors relating to my assignments and course content. I also visited the library yesterday and asked for help from the teacher at the research help desk (First interview, September 8, 2019)

Young’s expression of “misunderstanding” indicated that Young was frustrated by the communications between him and his instructor. As Young recalled, his instructor seemed a bit “unfriendly” and repeatedly recommended that he withdraw from the course whenever he asked questions during his instructor’s office hours. As will be discussed further below, Young decided to seek help outside the classroom without feeling too frustrated by his instructors’ responses. By visiting the writing centre and meeting with tutors there regularly,

Young gradually improved his writing practice and gained confidence by positioning himself as an EAL learner who needed academic support.

Within any ecological system, individuals must be willing to perceive learning affordances and capacities to act upon them. Young's resources in the above extract were available to every student; however, Young was the only participant in this study to consistently and persistently visit the writing centre. Young grasped a simple but essential skill for newcomers: his willingness to ask for help when he encountered struggles rather than withdrawing from his challenges. He could articulate his concerns by interacting with various supporting agents without feeling intimidated by his instructors' discouragement. As shown, Zoey and Young's case showed the alignment of their perceptions and actions in dynamically interacting with the affordances in their learning contexts.

6.4.2 Dynamic Integrations of Past and Present Experiences

Another salient theme is related to participants' integration of their prior learning experiences and current composition studies. In this study, most participants realized that their previous academic reading and writing experiences were limited, which prevented them from effectively managing their current composition studies. However, recognition of the difference or inconsistency between two different academic systems progressively changed over time. As they became more familiar with current course expectations and gained more practice with course assignments, participants tended to modify their perceptions toward their prior writing experiences and future goals. For example, Emily initially believed she knew how to write academically since the required written essays were similar to what she practiced for the TOEFL exam. By the end of the semester, however, she changed her ideas when asked about the relevance of TOEFL preparation to her current composition practice:

Jing: Do you think your previous writing experiences, such as TOEFL or other exam-based preparation, is sufficient to support your writing in your composition course?

Emily: Not that much. They are quite different. The TOEFL exam preparation might help me a bit with the summary writing, but the citation rules and writing research papers were totally new to me. I am still learning how to make a strong argument by including a claim, ground and warrant. It is also hard for me to include my own ideas in an organized way. (Second interview, December 17, 2019)

As shown, Emily appeared to develop her understanding of the similarity and differences between what she previously practiced and her current writing tasks. Since she recognized that her previous writing experiences of TOEFL preparation were not enough to support her learning in her current composition course, Emily took agentic action in actively learning how to compose a strong argument and recognized that she needed to take further action to improve her writing practices. Similarly, Young reported that he benefited from a pathway program he took before enrolling in his composition studies and indicated that, “without that one-month experience, I will feel more challenged now.” What Young noted is in line with scholarship in the field of EAP or L2 writing, which reports that pathway or sheltered programs are helpful for EAL writers transitioning into mainstream studies in a Canadian context (Haggerty, 2019; Keefe & Shi, 2017). For instance, Haggerty (2019) found that a pathway program (a newly designed academic language program) helped EAL learners transfer into their mainstream studies in a BC university. However, given the constraints of institutional policies and lack of funding, creating new programs may be unrealistic for some Canadian universities.

Besides integrating past and present learning experiences into aligned efforts, some participants also aimed toward long-term or future goals rather than obtaining a passing grade in the course. For example, when asked about his course goals, Gu responded that he hoped to know the difference between himself and other academic writers to bridge such differences

and complete the course. When we revisited his goals in a second interview, Gu held onto this optimistic belief despite the unexpected challenges he encountered:

I think my goal to write academically has been somehow achieved, but not quite obvious. I am unsatisfied since the course instructor provided me quite limited feedback, but the course is effective, and I have achieved my goal by self-learning (Second interview, December 19, 2019)

As shown, Gu was aware of the importance of academic writing for his learning journey and set a clear goal to improve his writing practice in the long run. Although his goal was “somehow” achieved as he self-perceived, he seemed to enjoy the “self-learning” process and was proud of the progress he made. Also, Gu indicated the “limited feedback” he received from his instructor as an external factor contributing to his dissatisfaction. From a second language socialization perspective, EAL students can be positioned as marginalized learners by obtaining insufficient feedback on their written work (Anderson, 2017; Séror, 2008). Although influential, the effect of obtaining limited feedback on Gu’s learning seemed less detrimental since he held a long-term goal and took a strong agentive stance in his learning and socialization. His internal socialization was manifested in his strong affective stance of being confident and resilient to overcome challenges he encountered in his writing trajectories. Aligned with practical efforts in seeking external resources, the role of agency therefore has a strong impact on facilitating Gu’s socialization process that are conducive to his academic success.

Furthermore, Gu and other participants developed their reflexivity in the process of exerting their agency. During the second round of interviews, participants presented a deepened understanding of academic writing. They reflected on how their writing could be further improved if they were more familiar with the academic conventions expected by their composition classes. For example, Zoey reported her realization of the importance of “critical

thinking” in reading and writing essays by reflecting on her learning of “integrating others’ perspectives appropriately” into her essay writing rather than only arguing her ideas. When he received a low grade for his summary writing, Gu took responsibility and reflected on how he “should ask for clarification before writing.” As such, Gu displayed his developed self-reflection while gaining more knowledge and skills in his writing practices.

6.4.3 Proactive Building-up of Support Networks

In this study, participants proactively built up their individual networks of academic writing practices by interacting and engaging with various agents, communities, and artifacts. Beyond interactions with composition instructors, other resources included but were not limited to one-on-one tutoring at the writing centre, soliciting peer support (both L1 and L2), attending workshops, and employing online tools. By placing learners at the centre of the socialization process, Zappa-Hollman and Duff (2015) have proposed using the construct of Individual Network of Practice (INoP) to examine the types and roles of various resources. Aligned with their guidance, the section below discusses how participants built up their own individual networks of academic writing practices by interacting and engaging with various agents and resources in the context of first-year composition studies.

First, every participant reported they had visited the Writing Centre but differed in terms of frequency and consistency. Writing centres are a common form of academic support in North American universities and the main source of help for EAL learners (Okuda & Anderson, 2018). From an academic discourse socialization perspective, tutors at the writing centre serve as agents to socialize EAL writers into expected writing conventions and norms. However, the effect on whether or to what extent students’ academic writing improved, varies for individual learners. In this study, the students who visited the writing centre persistently and regularly tended to express their appreciation for the support they received and benefit from acquired writing skills and knowledge. For example, Young described in detail how a

tutor at the writing centre guided him through detailed hands-on assistance on one of his writing assignments:

I remembered the first time when I asked about how to write a reflective letter, she wrote everything on a piece of paper in detail, explaining what it is by relating to what I've learned before, such as, what are my ideas and how to use it to respond to the summary I made by reading the article...That is really helpful. (First interview, September 8, 2019)

As reported, interactive one-on-one tutoring was very effective in accommodating Young's concerns and writing needs. Compared to his instructor's communication, Young reported he felt more comfortable and confident interacting with the tutors at the writing centre who were encouraging and less judgemental. Additionally, by joining a six-week Learning Plan (an individualized learning program set for EAL writers) recommended by his instructor, Young gained extra one-on-one support for his writing practices. Altogether, Young noted he spent almost five to ten hours meeting tutors per week through the whole semester. His time and energy devoted to interacting with writing tutors, an enactment of agency, facilitated his academic writing improvement and socialization process.

In addition to seeking academic support from tutors at the writing centre, learner agency among participants was also reflected in their efforts to establish individual networks of practice informally. For instance, to obtain different perspectives on his written draft, Gu exerted his agency by asking for advice from an academic advisor in his discipline, NES roommates, and attending workshops related to academic writing. He explained in detail the workshops he attended:

One is organized by the library; another one may be organized by the Residence. I am not sure since they said if you want to improve your writing, just come to the Fair. So, I did. The library one is huge like a peer-reviewed workshop. Students are invited to

read each other's papers and provide feedback. Because there is limited time for a student to read each other's papers, I think the effect is limited. (Second interview, December 19, 2019)

The Fair that Gu described seemed to be a group peer-review activity. Students were organized to review others' written work, provide quick feedback within a limited time, and then exchange papers with another student. In doing so, students could obtain quick feedback from multiple perspectives and contribute their ideas to others' work in a mutual way. Although the effect of engaging in this activity was "limited," Gu made a crucial step to immerse himself in the local environment, which is important for international students. Moreover, the positive comments that he received from NES students (including his roommates) facilitated his awareness and socialization of key aspects of academic writing conventions and practices. Promisingly, Gu noted that he learned how to conduct self-directed studies, an unexpected benefit, by interacting and engaging with various agents and resources. From a language socialization perspective, both EAL learners and their peers can be powerful socialization agents, especially when the primary facilitator (such as instructors) are absent (Duff, 2010; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). The example of participants like Gu further validates how building up individual networks through the enactment of agency can facilitate improved academic writing practices and self-directed socialization experiences.

Another manifestation of learner agency in their academic socialization process was EAL learners' effective use of artifacts, such as online tools and resources. For example, MoMo employed an important strategy searching for information online and using various digital tools in her process of "learning to write." MoMo reported she learned the APA citation style mainly from the university website and other online resources. Additionally, she chose a research topic related to social media and felt the process was enjoyable. Although she reported finding academic sources challenging because of her chosen topic, MoMo took

an agentive role in the digital world by making full use of her digital literacy. She also gained knowledge by surfing websites in both English and Mandarin Chinese. Equipped with previous experience using online tools, EAL writers in this study seemed to integrate such tools into their learning process naturally. For instance, Zoey reported using *Zotero* to automatically generate citation lists, but she rechecked the lists before submitting her research paper. Furthermore, when she felt confused or uncertain about particular rules, she would ask for help from the research help desk or writing centre. Additionally, by employing web-based Google docs, she was also involved in collaborative writing with one of her classmates, which enriched her writing experiences. Therefore, exerting learner agency by using digital tools and online resources provides EAL learners with complementary learning opportunities, which facilitates their academic socialization.

6.4.4 Autonomous Decision-making in Navigating Uncertainties

Students' academic discourse socialization processes are not only mediated by various external agents and resources, such as instructors or tutors at the writing centre, textbooks, and online resources, but also can be internally mediated or self-directed (Anderson, 2017). Having agency and having choices are closely connected (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). In the process of self-directed socialization for participants in this study, learner agency was also enacted when participants made informed decisions and modified their coping strategies in navigating their writing trajectories. The effect of exerting their agency can either facilitate or impede their academic discourse socialization. A typical example in this study is Young, who resisted following his instructors' repeated advice to withdraw from his composition class but decided to stay in his section. According to Young's description, since he was the only EAL student in his class, the instructor reportedly treated him the same as native English speakers. During the process of interacting with his instructor, Young felt an increasing amount of stress when his instructor repeatedly recommended that he drop the course:

I cannot fully understand what the teacher said in class time, first of all. Since she might tell a joke that only native speakers can understand. I felt lost and sad about it since I cannot figure out what is happening. Every time I go to her office hours, she might suggest that I register for COMP 99 and stop answering my questions anymore (First interview, September 8, 2019).

As presented, Young interpreted his instructor's suggestion as a signal of unwelcomeness, and he became too intimidated to communicate with the instructor during her office hours since he was unsure how to deal with the stressful situation and tried to avoid potential misunderstanding. His instructor suggesting that he withdraw in turn socialized him into a category of an inferior EAL learner marginalized from others in his class. Young reflected that he felt "so bad about himself." Despite his rocky interaction with his instructor, Young excised his agency by deciding to stay in the class and seek support external to the classroom, as discussed above. Furthermore, since socialization is a bi- or multi-directional process, it occurs between various agents and resources. In Young's case, in addition to being socialized into positioning himself as inferior to NES peers, Young also socialized his instructor into believing that he would exert his utmost efforts into his composition studies and firmly decided to stay in the class without quitting. As Young later reported, his instructor provided him with an opportunity to enrol in a six-week learning plan specifically designed for EAL writers in need of writing assistance. This time, Young exerted his agency by accepting his instructor's offer and committed to going through with his writing practices. Both Young's act of resistance and acceptance of his instructor's advice demonstrate his enactment of agency: making his own decision when options and resources were provided.

In addition to making their own decisions, another important aspect of their self-directed socialization is strategically coping with uncertainties about and struggles in their academic writing practices. For instance, Emily developed a way to incorporate various

resources when completing her writing assignments at different stages of her composition studies. When asked about her development in academic writing, Emily cheerfully shared with me a set of procedures that she developed for composing and revising her written drafts:

At first, I will follow the guideline and samples that the instructor provided very carefully and write the first draft, then I will send my draft to the instructor for suggestions. After I get the feedback, I will make changes accordingly and revise the draft. Then I will bring them to the Writing Centre to meet the tutors there. We work together on my paper, which is also quite helpful. Sometimes I could even have a whole paragraph changed. Then I might feel ready to produce the final version and hand it in. (First interview, September 28, 2019)

It therefore appears that Emily worked hard and learned how to wisely and strategically make use of the support that was available to her. In addition to benefiting greatly from interactions with her instructor and the help gained from the writing centre, Emily indicated the positive role of feedback from peer-editing practices, exchanges with her Chinese friends on her research ideas, and using the online tool of *Grammarly* to check her grammar and vocabulary use. Her agency demonstrated a self-directed process of interacting with texts and various agents in her academic discourse and community. Emily also enhanced her confidence in interaction and engagement with learning affordances in the language socialization process.

6.5 Discussion and Summary

This chapter reported findings on changes and growth that student participants had experienced, mainly manifested in their accumulated sense of fulfillment toward taking their FYC course, deepened understandings of academic writing concepts and conventions, strengthened skills in composing strong arguments, as well as their enhanced learner agency in accessing learning affordances. Considering their still-developing English proficiency after

arriving in Canada shortly before enrolling in their compositional courses (except for Serena, who was in her third year of study), it was illustrative that these students overcame significant challenges in interpreting course expectations, completing their written assignments, and developing academic literacy in reading and writing at a university level. However, it is also essential to take a balanced perspective in acknowledging that, as reported in this chapter, each participant met challenges that were unexpected and took proactive actions to draw on various supports and resources from their surrounding environment by exerting learner agency.

Informed by an ecological perspective and language socialization theory on the construct of affordances and learner agency, the findings in this chapter offer evidence about how students attempted to seek learning opportunities and engage with various agents and sources in order to navigate their writing journey and improve their academic performance. In alignment with previous research on second language academic socialization, the current study's findings showed that EAL writers' learner agency significantly affects their writing trajectories, especially their self-directed learning process (Anderson, 2017, Duff & Doherty, 2015). Being active agents, most participants could leverage the external and internal resources in strategic ways to create favourable learning opportunities and outcomes in their writing trajectories. Therefore, the interrelatedness between "active learners" and the surrounding environment revealed the uniqueness and diversity of enactment of learners' agency in interacting with various mediated affordances for academic writing development.

Despite their efforts, the actual resources that participants employed, the amount of help they obtained, and the extent to which they drew upon various affordances varied greatly from participant to participant. As discussed above, some participants were more agentive and resourceful than others in how they sought support from their surrounding environment. The findings also show that students who were more aware of their challenges early on and

actively familiarized themselves with surrounding support were more easily able to achieve their course goals. The outcome of academic socialization among student participants was shown as complicated and unpredictable, which cannot be guaranteed by enacting learner agency (Duff & Doherty, 2015). The instances of students' exertion of learner agency highlight socialization in building support networks of academic writing practices and being autonomous in their decision making, which is conducive to students' self-directed socialization process and holistic academic performance.

The findings of student participants' agentive efforts to seek various affordances to improve their academic writing are aligned with other empirical studies on multilingual students. For instance, Morton et al. (2015) found that multicultural learners who can solicit feedback from a wide range of people have multiple resources available within their reach. Similarly, Zappa-Hollman and Duff (2015) emphasized, "what is remarkable was just how resourceful the participants were in drawing on a wide range of human and other forms of support..." (p. 357). In line with these findings, this study's participants appeared to navigate their ways of understanding their environments and sought resources they felt were necessary for academic success. In engaging and interacting with sources and resources, the findings show that students' enactment of the agency was impacted by a range of contextual and individual factors.

Chapter 7. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to understand in-depth the perceptions and experiences of Chinese EAL learners, especially the challenges and resources they encountered when navigating their first-year composition courses in a Canadian university from an ecological and language socialization perspective. Guided by this holistic and sociocultural framework, a qualitative case study design enables this study to collect data from multiple perspectives and pay attention to students' changes throughout the learning process.

Five main overarching questions guided this study: first, what academic writing needs and challenges do Chinese EAL students perceive and identify when taking the first-year academic writing requirement course COMP 100? Second, what writing needs and challenges of Chinese EAL students do composition faculty identify? Third, how are the two groups similar to or different from each other? Fourth, what are the major factors in the learning context impacting EAL students' perceptions and writing experiences identified by both composition faculty and Chinese EAL students? Fifth, how do Chinese EAL students use resources to develop their academic writing skills and improve their socialization experiences?

This chapter first summarizes the main findings of the five research questions listed above with concrete summaries of the trajectories of each student participants and a brief summary of each finding chapter. It then discusses how an ecological perspective and LS theories contributes to the results of this study. Based on these interpretations and discussions, the third section puts forward some pedagogical suggestions for supporting EAL learners by reframing EAL students' challenges, reflecting on writing assignment design, rethinking ways to provide written feedback, and cultivating EAL students' learner agency and resourcefulness. This thesis concludes with a section that explores its limitations and recommendations for future research.

7.1 Recapitulation of Findings

The major findings of this study have offered an in-depth look at the writing trajectories and academic socialization experiences of six Chinese EAL students as they navigated their FYC courses in a Canadian university. Given the affordances in their learning environment, each participant displayed nuances in their learning activities and agentic stances: Young met unexpected difficulties in meeting the course expectations and felt a strong sense of isolation as the only EAL student in his composition class. Despite contextual constraints, he proactively sought help outside his classroom and completed his study by particularly benefiting from one-on-one support from tutors at the Writing Center on campus. Coming from the same Chinese university, Zoey reported fewer difficulties in navigating her writing class, but exhibited a similarly strong agentic stance in navigating her academic writing trajectory. To compose her research papers, for example, Zoey intentionally interacted with supportive people including her composition instructor, academic advisor, writing tutor, and devoted much of her time and energy. Among other participants, three participants graduated from international high schools in China who had varied writing experiences: Gu felt dissatisfied with the limited written feedback from his instructor and chose to self-direct his learning by participating in activities organized by the library and international student services. Facing similar challenges, MoMo approached independent learning by regulating her learning routines, such as regularly checking the course schedule and spending most of her study time at the library. She also preferred to search information online and use digital resources. Different from other participants, Emily claimed benefited greatly from the interactions with her instructor, asking questions and obtaining comments on her draft by email exchanges. As the only third-year student who enrolled in the composition course, Serena appeared less stressful than other participants and set realistic goals for her composition course. Without seeking outside support, she focused on classroom studies and

gained confidence in academic essays. As shown, despite overlapping challenges, each student varied in their writing trajectories and agentic actions.

Overall, in line with previous scholarship on the academic experiences of Chinese EAL students (e.g., Huang & Klinger; 2006; Liu, 2016; Preston & Wang, 2017; Wu, 2015; Zhang & Zhou, 2010), this study confirms that a similar population group of Chinese EAL undergraduates struggled when compared to NES in mainstream FYC courses. From ecological and language socialization perspectives, students' holistic writing trajectories were impacted by a range of factors at macro-meso-micro levels of contexts. Meanwhile, in response to the challenges they met, student participants enacted their learner agency in accessing learning affordances to improve their academic writing practices and socialization experiences. The surveys and interviews conducted with both writing faculty and students in the study indicated that both groups unanimously perceived that EAL undergraduates need extra support to achieve academic success in writing. Specifically, this study's findings have revealed how students exerted their agency and resourcefulness in managing their writing trajectories. The main findings were reported in the three main chapters, summarized below.

Chapter four reports on the findings from the first three research questions by presenting the perspectives of student participants and composition faculty separately to compare their overlapping and divergent perceptions. From students' perspectives, this study found that most participants felt challenged when taking their composition courses. Four main aspects featuring students' writing trajectories are discussed: relearning English skills for academic communication, accommodating course expectations and requirements, navigating intensive reading tasks and critical thinking, and negotiating self-positioning concerning NES. Although students who graduated from international high schools felt more comfortable with the English environment than those who came from traditional Chinese public schools, most participants perceived FYC courses as demanding and expected to gain assistance to complete

their course assignments in Canada. Meanwhile, the data suggested that faculty participants perceived Chinese EAL students as displaying both strengths and challenges in their first-year composition courses. In addition to thinking positively of these students' learning attitudes and commitment to their composition studies, instructors commented on the challenging aspects that Chinese EAL students faced in terms of their oral and written communication, including students' lack of familiarity and struggles in meeting course expectations.

The comparison of perceptions regarding EAL students' needs and challenges in FYC courses between students and faculty indicated both similarities and differences. Their overlapping perceptions showed that both groups were aware of Chinese EAL students' main difficulties and attempted to improve the situation. However, each group's divergent perceptions also revealed some blind spots that each group might have overlooked. In line with the results of previous studies that conducted need assessments among EAL students and faculties (e.g., Huang, 2010; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005), this finding highlighted a similar misalignment between students' perceived needs and expectations and those that instructors intended to provide. Furthermore, this study revealed the complexities of EAL issues in mainstream composition courses. It is valuable if instructors pay more attention to the EAL students' emotional pressure and affective needs in taking composition studies, and support them to have access to the available resources in their university environment.

Chapter five explored the contextual factors that impacted EAL learners' writing practices in FYC courses by drawing on an ecological framework to analyze the learning context of EAL students at macro-meso-micro levels (DFG, 2016; Duff, 2019). Within and across each level of context, this study identified several factors that play a critical role in impacting EAL students' overall experiences. At the macro-level, monolingual norms and a deficit discourse toward EAL learners shapes the perceptions and pedagogical responses of composition instructors and administrators at Canadian universities. In this study, such a

deficit model manifested in the impatience some composition instructors displayed toward meeting EAL learners' needs in language and academic literacy development. At the meso-level of this institutional context, misalignments between the university plan advocating for internationalization and EAL learners' actual learning experiences showed that accommodation services for EAL learners' needs require further improvement. At the micro-level of social interactions, this study identified that written feedback and peer review activities played a critical role in shaping EAL students' engagements and interactions with learning affordances. Additionally, multiple perspectives identified a gap between EAL learners' academic preparation and current course expectations. Due to some EAL students' lack of the required academic foundations in reading and writing practices, most student participants felt challenged in navigating their academic writing, despite the significant time and effort they put into their composition courses.

Chapter six further discussed how students navigate their writing trajectories by enacting learner agency in seeking various types of support and resources both in and beyond their FYC courses. Informed by language socialization theories and ecological views on learner agency, the findings offered evidence for how students become novice first-year academic writers, which was mainly manifested in their gained sense of fulfillment toward taking their FYC course, deepened understandings of academic writing concepts and conventions, strengthened skills in composing arguments, as well as enhanced learner agency in accessing learning affordances. The findings also reveal that students exercised their agency by taking various "paths" towards language socialization for improving their academic writing, which was mediated by various affordances within and beyond FYC courses. Despite their socialization experiences in FYC courses, participants positively reported their interactions with tutors at the Writing Center. They also benefited from attending workshops, asking help from academic advisors in their disciplines, and helpful

friends, which impacted their decision-making and actions for being socialized into valued writing practices and their disciplinary communities. Examples of students' enhanced agency development can in turn benefit instructors and administrators in helping future EAL students become socialized more effectively into their composition practices in the academic community.

7.2 An Ecological Understanding of EAL Writers' Academic Writing and Socialization Experiences

Theoretically, this study has applied ecological perspectives to EAL learners' academic writing and socialization experiences in mainstream writing classrooms. While scholarship that applies sociocultural approaches has investigated the complexities of L2 writing issues among different population groups in various contexts, there have been few explicit applications of an ecological perspective to EAL writing issues (e.g., Garner & Borg, 2005; van Lier, 2004; Vorobel & Kim, 2017). As summarized by Steffensen and Kramsch (2017), the recent development of an ecological enterprise has tended to focus more on "the eco-systemic dynamics where agents pick up on the affordances and pressure of the environment..." (p. 7). Along this line of research, this study situated students' experiences contextually to provide a holistic understanding of their encountered challenges, changes to perceptions and practices concerning their learning environment at various levels, as well as the enactment of learner agency for managing their course assignments and interacting with various resources for improving their academic writing. Additionally, this study was also informed by theories of (second) language socialization and academic discourses, especially adult learners' language socialization in academic writing. The following section will elaborate on three aspects of how this study benefited from employing an ecological and sociocultural framework.

First, an ecological perspective to language learning enabled this study to explore the contextual and individual factors in student challenges, building an ecological understanding of participants' writing experiences across the context of their FYC courses. As Heng (2018) study argued, only paying attention to the challenge students' face without adequately examining the influential factors within contexts can cause unfair misperceptions about EAL learners. For example, this study found the type of high school that student participants attended greatly impacted their initial transitional experiences into English composition learning. Specifically, students who graduated from international high schools in China, such as B.C. offshore schools, felt more comfortable and confident when entering English-medium studies than students who graduated from traditional high schools. Despite their oral fluency, participants all perceived their FYC courses as demanding. This finding aligns with a recent study by Alexander (2019), which focused mainly on Chinese BCOS graduates' experiences and found that participants could transfer smoothly into university studies in Canada. Compared with international students at a university level, BCOS graduates in Canadian higher education remain an under-examined research population (Alexander, 2019; Wang, 2017).

Guided by an ecological perspective and LS theories, this study also found some institutional and instructor factors impacted EAL students' academic writing development and socialization experiences. Institutionally, classroom size and instructors' heavy workload may lead to EAL students' limited access to learning resources in the classroom environment. Instructors with intensive workloads may be left little extra time or energy to support EAL learners' specific needs, no matter whether or not they intended to be helpful. Therefore, learning about how these factors implicitly or explicitly impact the ways that EAL students were challenged may provide insights for writing administrators, instructors, and stakeholders in other services who intend to support these students in the university environment.

Second, an ecological approach captures the dynamics of learners' perceptions, interactions, and changes in taking their FYC courses. For instance, this study found the nature of the students' challenges varied; meaning, some difficulties were more persistent and took extended time for improvement, such as reading comprehension, and some were temporary, such as learning about course expectations. This result supports Heng's (2018) study that indicated some challenges might be dismissed over time and student agency plays a crucial role in managing these challenges. Most student participants in the current study reported they felt a sense of learning and were proud of composing a research paper by the end of the term. Amidst most studies (including part of this study) which have examined Chinese EAL learners' and highlighted their encountered challenges or perceived deficits to their NES counterparts, an ecological view serves well to represent the experiences of six individual participants in this study in terms of their difficulties, changes, and successes holistically.

Finally, informed by the notion of "agency" from both an ecological and academic socialization perspective, this study further extends the understanding of how EAL writers enacted learner agency in seeking affordances for improving their academic writing practice and socialization experiences. From an ecological perspective, their agency was manifested by the alignment of their evolved perceptions and actions in improving their academic writing. Students constructed their experiences in terms of practice gains. Their growth was reflected in the process of managing written assignments, interacting with instructors and peers, and dealing with various challenges throughout the semester. Furthermore, compared to what they knew about academic writing at the beginning of the course, students exhibited more knowledge and skills in analyzing features of readings, constructing arguments based on academic sources, and producing more extended essays. Their enactments of agency were manifested in their strengthened awareness of their academic writing difficulties and

consistent efforts to improve them. Echoing previous studies on learner agency of L2 writers in composition classrooms (e.g., Stuart, 2012), this study similarly presented that EAL students proactively navigated the challenges and uncertainties they encountered in FYC classrooms, but also gained a real sense of learning. It also provides strong support for the conclusion that Heng (2018) drew from his study involving eighteen Chinese undergraduate students in a U.S. college: students who may be perceived as passive and needy were actually engaged in strategic actions to turn challenges and tension into learning opportunities. Because of their efforts, some of the challenges facing EAL learners, identified by this and many previous studies (e.g., Anderson 2017; Haggerty, 2019; Stuart, 2012), were proven temporary. For instance, Haggerty's (2019) empirical studies showed most EAL participants succeeded in their first-year academic program despite their initial confusion and frustration toward the unfamiliar design features of academic courses.

This study's findings provide strong support for the role agency played in the language socialization process, especially evident in students' self-directed studies for improving their academic writing. Given the importance of academic writing for any perceived success at the undergraduate level (Hyland, 2013), a deeper understanding of EAL writers' socialization processes is necessary. Students' academic discourse socialization was mediated by their willingness and ability to enact agency in their writing about academic writing practices. From a contemporary LS perspective, Duff and Doherty's (2015) study indicated learner agency is a crucial component in their self-directed process of socialization since "highly motivated learners plan and exert their agency in various ways to achieve their goals" (p. 55), and their efforts by using different social and cultural resources can transform their learning outcomes. In a similar vein, Anderson's (2017) study uncovered that the Chinese EAL participants (at the PhD level) were "resilient, grounded, and exceedingly talented" (p. ii) in strategically seeking both external and internal resources to overcome the

adversities in their pursuit of clear goals. Aligned with this prior scholarship (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Godfrey, 2015; Haggerty, 2019; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), this study deepens the understanding of how learner agency played a crucial role in EAL writers socialization practices and process, which is often multifaceted and unpredictable. As Duff and Doherty (2015) specified, learners' agentive stances can either impede or facilitate their process of socialization. In the case of Young, in this study, his agentive decision to not accept his instructor's suggestion for dropping the course impeded the communication with his instructor and native English-speaking peers in the classroom since he felt unwelcome. Meanwhile, such an agentive stance promoted his efforts to seek help outside the classroom and facilitated his interaction with tutors at the Writing Center. As Godfrey (2015) highlights, "learner agency to enact and resist socialization further complicated the socialization process" (p. 169). Therefore, EAL writers' enactment of agency plays a critical role in self-directed socialization practices. However, it cannot guarantee the smooth process of socialization, which is impacted by various mediating factors.

7.3 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

Several pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. From an ecological and language socialization perspective, I discuss how the findings of this study can inform pedagogical considerations for creating more learning opportunities and supporting EAL learners in FYC courses. I also draw reference from the revised version of the CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers issued in 2020, twenty years since the original version was released. In terms of guidelines for FYC programs, multilingual writers, and teacher preparation, the critical issues presented in the Statement provide a frame of reference for the following discussion of the curriculum and pedagogical implications and suggestions in light of the local context for this study.

The default model of teaching composition in many institutions is called mainstreaming, which has proven problematic (Knoblock & Gorman, 2018; Silva, 1993). Promisingly, scholarship in the field of EAP or L2 writing advocates that some pathway or sheltered programs have proven helpful for EAL writers in Canadian contexts (Haggerty, 2019; Keefe & Shi, 2017). For instance, Haggerty (2019) found a newly designed academic language program at a Canadian university was beneficial for helping EAL learners transfer into their mainstream studies. In this study, particularly, AWE has attempted to introduce alternative models for pedagogical innovation, although most are at an experimental stage and do not specifically target EAL writers. However, given the constraints of institutional policies or lack of funding, creating new programs may be unrealistic for some composition departments. Under the current situation in a Canadian context, this study put forward some practical pedagogical recommendations addressing four components: reframing EAL challenges in a holistic way, reflecting on the design of written assignments, rethinking written feedback as a dialogue with EAL Learners, as well as cultivating agency and resourcefulness among EAL learners.

7.3.1 Reframing EAL students' Writing Challenges in a Holistic Way

This study suggests that composition faculty reframe EAL students' writing challenges and needs in terms of their overall experiences and dynamics of change. Given that EAL students' challenges and difficulties in western universities have often been the primary targets for many previous studies, including part of this study, it is crucial to take a holistic and balanced perspective toward EAL students' writing trajectories over time. Impacted by the deficit discourse of viewing EAL students, composition instructors may frame students' challenges by their insufficient language capacities overlooking their previous learning backgrounds and differences. As shown in this study, although the participants came from similar sociocultural and educational backgrounds, their differences are diverse and

unique. For instance, MoMo, Gu and Emily all graduated from international high schools in China. They collectively showed more confidence in oral English fluency than participants who graduated from public (Chinese-language) high schools. However, even international schools have various types. To be specific, MoMo studied the BC curriculum and took provincial BC exams, but Gu and Emily took a US-oriented program. Thus, the diverse and complex backgrounds define and distinguish EAL learners from each other and native English speakers. Their differences also shaped their experiences in FYC courses in a unique way. Therefore, reframing EAL students' writing challenges by acknowledging and appreciating their learning background complexities refine composition faculty's perceptions toward these students and mitigate a deficit discourse viewing them.

Additionally, it is suggested that composition instructors might pay attention to the changes and progress of EAL learners in their FYC courses and scaffold their writing needs appropriately. Students' accounts of their challenges in this study showed that some difficulties could be overcome during the process of engaging with classroom activities and written assignments, such as familiarization with academic conventions; meanwhile, some challenges were persistent and could not be easily alleviated within a four-month semester, such as reading proficiency for intense academic texts. In particular, most student participants indicated their emotional pressure related to their academic performance in writing. However, instructors seemed to underestimate the emotional impact on students' overall academic performance. Recognizing this can allow instructors to address, clarify, and contest students' initial challenges with focused support. For example, instructors could guide EAL students on how to access campus resources and provide opportunities to meet face-to-face, which would be incredibly beneficial for alleviating the stress that related to composition studies. Thus, composition instructors are suggested to view EAL students' challenges from a holistic perspective and consider the impacting factors across time and space.

7.3.2 Reflecting on Writing Assignments Design

Concerning the design of writing assignments, the CCCC (2020) Statement recommends instructors to “provide students with multiple options for completing an assignment, such as by providing multiple prompts or allowing students to write in a variety of genres for completing the assignment” (Part Two, para. 2). FYC instructors need to keep EAL learners in mind when designing writing assignments, such as offering multiple options. In this study, two students indicated that they felt grateful for and benefited from having at least two options for completing their assignments. For instance, they could choose to do an oral presentation alone or compose a rhetorical analysis with a writing assignment partner. These options allow EAL learners to make informed decisions according to their strengths.

Moreover, it would be beneficial to EAL students if instructors intentionally make writing expectations and course requirements as explicit as possible, especially for newly designed assignments. In this study, both students and instructors reported that Chinese EAL learners struggled with specific assignments, particularly genre analysis assignments. Students’ difficulties in analyzing different academic genres could signal instructors to reflect on the causes in terms of their assignment design. It is also valuable for composition instructors to reflect on the purpose of their written assignments and make revisions with inclusive consideration to EAL learners. To respond to such a need, the CCCC (2020) Statement provides the following guidelines for instructors:

Writing instructors should gain experience in reflecting on how writing assignments may tacitly include cultural assumptions or tacitly rely on knowledge of culturally specific information. Writing instructors should also gain experience designing writing assignments with second language students in mind, considering topics that are culturally sensitive to multilingual writers and including directions easily understandable to multiple audiences. (Part Four, para, 3)

As the CCCC (2020) guidelines suggested, instructors should consider EAL learners' sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds when designing writing assignments. Assuming students know the implicit cultural norms and academic conventions may put these students at a disadvantage. In this study, some instructors noted that EAL learners in their classes had difficulties interpreting the assignment requirements and figuring out what they were expected to do. Following this guideline, instructors could include explicit scaffolding and in cooperating of additional resources, such as the Writing Center. Since most students reported experiencing difficulties in genre analysis, it is vital to build genre awareness and genre-specific knowledge among EAL writers by appealing to their multilingual resources (Kim & Belcher, 2018; Tardy et al., 2020). For example, instructors could first invite students to analyze the genre that they are familiar with, such as fairy tale or advertisement, and gradually guide them into analyzing academic genres. Because of the social and situated nature of genre learning, the building of EAL learners' genre knowledge and awareness depends on their availability and access to ecological resources across contexts. Accordingly, Tardy et al. (2020) provided a theoretical framework for both research and pedagogical design of writing tasks and activities addressing multilingual writers. In line with these suggestions, this study also recommends that classroom instructors consider EAL writers' language and cultural resources when designing genre analysis tasks and building on their familiarity with L1 genre knowledge.

7.3.3 Rethinking Written Feedback as a Sustained Dialogue with EAL Learners

It is proven that instructors' written feedback plays a crucial role in academic discourse socialization of EAL writers (Anderson 2020a). All of the instructors in this study indicated that they provided the same feedback and commentaries to all students without distinction. Given the constraints of class size and most instructors' heavy workloads, it is

understandable that they cannot afford to provide individualized feedback to accommodate EAL learners' specific language and academic needs.

However, instructors may still support EAL writers by responding promptly to their questions and concerns, providing constructive feedback that inspires and guides students in their revision process. As an instructor mentioned, "I provide feedback for revision, not for regrets" (Iris, Interview, October 10, 2019). In this study, a student participant Emily also shared with me that she benefited greatly through a sustained dialogue with her instructor by asking questions through email exchanges and sent her early draft for gaining pre-feedback. Two other participants also mentioned that they valued the chance to meet instructors individually face-to-face and gained focused feedback before submitting their final drafts for their research paper, even though each student in their class was only given ten minutes to meet with instructors in the class. It is worthwhile for instructors to attend to students' concerns and establish an interactional "dialogue" when providing written feedback or commentary.

Admittedly, providing commentary on content or rhetoric concerns is labour-intensive and time-consuming. In terms of the types of written feedback, the CCCC (2020) Statement advised: "Instructors need to learn strategies for seeing and promoting the textual features that are rhetorically effective, and for prioritizing two or three mechanical or stylistic issues that individual multilingual writers should focus on throughout the courses" (Part Four, para. 4). Furthermore, instructors should pay attention to the emotional impact of written feedback on EAL learners. According to Goldstein (2004), genuine praise with advice has essential functions in acknowledging the strength of writers, confirming what is useful in their writing, and building confidence for further revision. By positively commenting on students' composition processes or how revisions are effectively made, instructors build a sustained dialogue with students. In this study, two instructors indicated that journal writing assignment

enables them to understand students' emotional reactions and creates an opportunity for students to reflect on their compositional process.

Additionally, instructors' feedback on EAL learners' essays must be clear, transparent, and guided with specific rubrics or guidelines for assessments. Instructors can discuss how and why specific writing issues are more valued than others. For instance, instructors could openly discuss how grammar, mechanics, and style issues will be treated in students' writing exams or essays. This interactive discussion could help students modify their initial assumptions or expectations and see the actual intention of much of the instructors' written feedback. In the case of MoMo and Gu, they felt strongly discouraged and frustrated by limited feedback from their instructors, who commented only on their language issues. Although they attempted several times to communicate with their instructors for further explanation or guidance, MoMo and Gu failed to build a dialogue with their instructors when they only obtained the response as "please see my comments" without clear explanation and guidance. Thus, although it might be time-consuming, all students including EAL learners would benefit from this pedagogical practice, if instructors could view their provided written feedback as a sustained dialogue with EAL learners and provide students with clear rubrics of assessment.

7.3.4 Cultivating Learner Agency and Resourcefulness among EAL Learners

Considering the challenges EAL students encountered and the complex factors that constrained their efforts to pursue their academic writing practice goals and socialization, this study recommends creating an agency-rich and constructive environment for EAL learners. An ecological perspective to language acquisition conceptualizes agency as a dynamic alignment of awareness and taking action. Accordingly, an agency-rich environment should encourage learners to notice the learning affordances and take agentive actions despite potential constraints by contextual factors. In composition classrooms, for example,

instructors could create agency-rich environments by raising students' awareness in accessing linguistic and rhetorical resources, providing multiple options for approaching learning contents, and increasing their sense of control in exercising their agency, such as decision making. For FYC instructors, holistically understanding students' perceptions and experiences is the starting point. However, only recognizing the difference that EAL learners bring to the classroom may overlook their own needs for developing both English proficiencies and academic writing capacities. Theoretically, the CCCC (2020) Statement encourages instructors to "identify strengths that multilingual writers bring to the classroom" and "look for opportunities to use students' current literacy practices as a foundation for teaching the expectations of academic literacy" (Part Four, para, 3). Empirical studies also call instructors to value the knowledge and linguistic resources that EAL students bring to the course and create spaces and opportunities for EAL learners to contribute as members of the FYC community (e.g., Knoblock & Gorman, 2018; Shapiro et al., 2016). In response to the calls of cultivating learner agency among EAL students, Shapiro et al. (2016) proposed a framework of "teaching for agency." They exemplified how to promote the learner agency of multilingual writers in classroom practices. Some pedagogical innovations they suggested, such as designing a writing project about films for an international section of a freshman writing program, serve as an excellent case for promoting EAL writer's agency by optimizing the context and providing students options.

This study's findings serve as a reminder that EAL learners have rich and diverse backgrounds that prepare them to contribute to academic contexts such as FYC courses uniquely. From an ecological and LS perspective, EAL students in this study exemplify that learning and socialization are closely related to agency and various environments. As van Lier (2010) specified, the manifestation of learner agency can be more individual or more social, it can be more creative or more routine, and it can be more severe or more playful, and so on..."

(p. 5). Despite significant challenges in navigating their academic writing when taking the FYC courses, in this study, most student participants also displayed a high degree of agency in managing their difficulties and seeking support from multiple resources. The enactment of learner agency is exemplified in the different “paths” that participants in this study chose in seeking external and internal affordances for improving their academic writing. As emphasized by the AWE program director in this study, “they (EAL students) should be an asset, not a problem” (Interview, November 18, 2019).

It would be beneficial for EAL students if instructors could cultivate EAL learner agency by optimizing the learning conditions from the design of curriculum and syllabus, arrangement of classroom activities, as well as methods of assessment. For example, instructors could consider including multimodality and digital components in writing activities, such as writing a blog post. EAL students may feel encouraged to practice writing by exploring multiple literacies and rhetorical strategies. If instructors or academic advisors can integrate the use of social media such as Facebook groups or WeChat groups, to communicate with or engage students for cooperative writing activities, the conditions and opportunities may be significantly optimized.

Additionally, this study suggests that composition instructors respect and trust in EAL students’ choices. To empower EAL students and enhance their agency, writing instructors should create spaces to exercise their decision-making and capacities with respect and trust. For instance, Shapiro et al. (2016) emphasized that allowing students to “thrive and stumble” in the created spaces with trust can lead to their “learning and resilience” as a reward (p. 49). These suggestions can apply to the findings of this study too. Instructors found that EAL learners were more successful when they made decisions independently and wrote about something they knew. Whereas most instructors in this study pointed out that EAL learners struggle with completing the assignment of genre analysis, Iris found she got remarkable

essays such as Chinese advertisements from Chinese EAL students since she made the purpose of assignment design clear to all students and invited them to write from their perspectives and experiences as a stepping stone into unfamiliar academic genres.

Finally, it is essential to note that each supportive agent or service unit plays a crucial role in addressing EAL learners' various needs within the ecosystem or network. Practical support for EAL learners would be maximized when these services cooperate. As proposed by Knoblock and Gorman (2018), these services could function as "a productive network," which was not determined by "human factors" but "institutional practices" (p. 291). However, it is not easy to integrate different services' efforts, which involves complex negotiations and cooperation. Instructors can play a part by inviting EAL specialists, writing tutors, and expert students to be guest speakers or embedded writing tutors for peer review activities regularly. Exposure to new information and engagement in cooperative activities can help students make informed decisions on what kind of support they need and exercise how to seek help from the available resources.

In summary, this study contributes to knowledge in the field of EAL writing by offering a holistic picture of the individualized writing trajectories of six Chinese students and documenting their writing practices and agentic stances as they work through the challenges within the context of a FYC course at a Canadian university. Drawing on ecological perspectives to language acquisition and language socialization theory, this study presents a complex picture of a multitude of actors within macro-meso-micro levels of context as these impact students' experiences. It further draws composition faculty's attention to the importance of taking account of the emotional pressure students experienced in seeking support as they navigate course expectations. Furthermore, it offers implications for policies and pedagogical practices with regards to supporting composition instructors in working with EAL students and in gaining further awareness of students' prior writing experiences.

7.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This dissertation employed a multiple-case study design and involved as primary data collection methods: (1) surveys with faculty and students for eliciting background information and their general attitude toward the writing experience of Chinese EAL learners (2) semi-structured interviews with each participant at the onset and near the end of the semester, and (3) students' voluntarily submitted written assignments with instructors feedback. Although case study as a qualitative method design offers many advantages for understanding the individual experiences and developmental processes within a particular context (Duff, 2014; Yin, 2018), there are also some limitations, both with the methodology of the case study itself and specific to the design of this study, which I present below.

First, the sampling and selection of students in this study could have been more diversified to include EAL learners of different ethnic groups who could provide broader and richer perspectives on academic writing challenges. There were two reasons for me to focus only on the group of Chinese EAL learners: one is my observation that there is a growing number of Chinese students who study abroad in North American. (For instance, in a summer section of COMP 100, half of the students in that class were from China.) Another is my insider position of similar cultural background with the participants and now as an international graduate student who still struggles with academic writing as an EAL learner. Additionally, my previous experience teaching first-year undergraduates in a Business college in China enabled me to feel attuned to students' needs and concerns. Although it was relatively easy for me to recruit student participants from surrounding communities, I met unexpected challenges in finding composition instructors because I narrowed the research subjects' scope to EAL learners from a Chinese background. I did not expect some instructors to treat EAL learners as diversified individuals without distinguishing them by nationality, language, or educational backgrounds. Some instructors even believed it was unnecessary to

do so. Although this study was specific and informative with one narrowed ethnic group, there is no doubt that broadening the participant pool by including EAL learners from other cultural backgrounds could generate new findings and add to the richness of existing literature.

Second, the methods for collecting data were confined by several factors. Despite the multiple methods I used to collect data in this study, it would have been preferable to observe EAL learners by gaining a rich experience in a classroom environment, mostly situated from an ecological perspective to language learning. My original research design included classroom observation; however, I finally gave up this method for collecting data due to the possible impact of my presence in the classroom for non-participant observation. Furthermore, since student assignments were submitted voluntarily, the representative sample of submitted assignments varied greatly. Some students were unwilling to share their grades or show me the comments of their instructors. I was also restricted by copying or screenshotting their assignment papers and submitting essays for exams that they took in class.

Furthermore, self-reporting data can be limited. The learners might not self-diagnose their learning situation and progress accurately. Although I included administrators and instructors' perspectives, which proved useful for triangulation, the differences in participants' perceptions of EAL learners' academic writing needs may be attributable to their experiences and understanding of the survey items. Moreover, students were limited by their awareness and capacities to self-diagnose their needs and academic settings challenges (Huang, 2010). Similarly, as the evaluators for students' performance, instructors may also not be the best judges for their obstacles, despite they have a keen observation and interaction with students in classroom settings. From the interactions with student participants, I found that student participants in this study spent lots of time at the Writing Center asking for

clarification and guidance for their assignments. To some extent, writing tutors might know about EAL learners' academic writing challenges and needs more than classroom instructors because of their different roles in supporting EAL students. Last but not least, even with the benefits and insights of the emic perspective I brought to this study, I also acknowledge I might have impacted some of my student participants by co-constructed interviews with them.

Future research could focus on exploring EAL learners' writing trajectories in FYC courses, and including EAL learners with diverse linguistic and cultural groups would further enrich research findings with rich data. In particular, considering the local context of this study, it is also necessary to include the needs of domestic students who are also EAL learners because of their families' immigration status. Compared to international EAL learners, their academic writing needs are more invisible and tend to be overlooked by instructors and academic support services. In addition to the sampling of EAL learners, the design of the research methods can also be modified within institutional contexts. Preferably, if future studies could include an ongoing need analysis of EAL learners with a larger sample size, the findings could identify and categorize students' specific needs with updated information to complement qualitative case studies. Institutional policies and programs would also benefit from such investigations. Moreover, it would be interesting to compare and contrast EAL learners and NES in terms of their attitudes, needs, and expectations in taking FYC courses (e.g., Stuart, 2012). The results would provide insights for pedagogical approaches to teaching composition with an inclusive curriculum. Concerning EAL writers' challenges in genre analysis, future studies can focus on bilingual or multilingual roles in EAL writers' building of genre knowledge and genre awareness.

7.5 Final Thoughts

This dissertation represents a culmination of my personal, professional, and academic endeavours and experiences. As a former English instructor in an EFL postsecondary context, I am always eager to learn how my students can survive or even thrive in English-speaking countries when they study abroad. As an international student, I also personally experienced the challenges that my participants encountered. However, this study differed from my original plan to depict the challenges that students experienced from both composition faculty and students' perspectives. The obstacles and difficulties that student participants meet in mainstream contexts are similar to what has been documented in previous scholarship. What emerged from the research and analysis process were students' highly agentic stances, which recognized their challenges as EAL learners and newcomers, demonstrated flexibility and resilience in interacting with their instructors and peers, and sought support from various resources within their academic environments. These qualities were manifested during managing the unexpected challenges they faced in their FYC courses and (lack of) support by various institutional, pedagogical, and individual factors. Concerning their course marks, all the participants completed their course requirements with passing grades. Two received A, two received B, and the last two received C and needed to retake the course as required by their discipline. Their strong commitment to academic writing and progress towards their academic studies were far beyond what marks could measure.

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Appendix A. Recruitment Poster (Students)

FIRST-YEAR INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENTS

who are also taking:

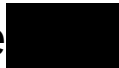


(Academic reading and writing)

This study will investigate the academic writing experiences of international Chinese Students who speak English as an additional language. The study hopes to discover how to best support students who are learning to write academically in English.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: (1) Participate in two face-to-face interviews; (2) voluntarily submit written assignments with teachers' feedback (3) Complete a short questionnaire outlining your previous educational experience.

The total time commitment is estimated to be approximately 2-3 hours over the course of a 4-month period.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a **\$10 gift card** to the  bookstore.

For more information or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Jing Mao

(PhD Candidate)

The Department of Curriculum & Instruction

jingmao@.ca



招募啦!

Participants Needed!

Are you a first-year student who is taking "English 101" at UVIC?

学术写作相信一定困扰着每个正在留学的小伙伴!
用词不够准确!
表达不够清晰!
语句不够严谨……
想躲过这些“坑”光靠努力可能是不够的!
学术写作课程设置真的有效吗?
老师真的了解中国留学生的学习需求吗?
……

大家好,我是本校教育学院在读博士生,上述问题的提出也正是我目前博士论文的研究方向。

如果您是正在学习“English 101”课程的大一学生,现邀请您完成一份简单的问卷(共8道中文题)。如您愿意加入后续研究,共同为改善中国留学生的学术写作教育现状贡献一份力量并助力我的研究,请您在问卷中留下您的联系方式。非常感谢您的参与!

*每位参与研究的小伙伴均会获得Uvic Bookstore 或 Starbucks的gift card一张。



扫描二维码直接获取问题。



Chinese EAL

Academic Writing

Support Them

This study is approved by the Uvic Human Research Ethics Board

Appendix B. Recruitment Poster (Instructors)

Participants needed for a research study involving:

Writing Instructors

Who teach:

██████████

(Academic Reading and Writing)

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating:
The written experiences of international Chinese students who
speak English as an additional language and how to
pedagogically support them for their academic writing.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: (1) Participate in one
face-to-face interview, and (2) Complete a short questionnaire outlining
your biographical teaching background.

The total time commitment is estimated to be approximately 1 hour over the
course of a single semester.

For more information or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Jing Mao

(PhD Candidate)

The Department of Curriculum & Instruction

jingmao@██████████.ca

Appendix C. Consent Form (Students)

Student Participant Consent Form

Difficult or Deficient?

Exploring the Academic Writing Needs and Challenges of First-year Chinese EAL Students at a Canadian University from an Ecological Perspective

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Difficult or Deficient? Exploring the Academic Writing Needs and Challenges of First-year Chinese EAL Students at a Canadian University from an Ecological Perspective” that is being conducted by Jing Mao, a Ph. D Candidate in the Faculty of Education.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a PhD in the Curriculum and Instruction Department in the Faculty of Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Wiebe and Dr. Tim Anderson. You may contact my supervisors at 250-721-7894 or 250-472-4290.

Purpose and Objectives

This study will investigate the needs and challenges involved in academic writing amongst Chinese students speaking English as an additional language (EAL) who take their first-year compulsory course [REDACTED] for academic writing at the University of Victoria. In addition, the study also intends to find out whether their identified needs and challenges in terms of academic writing are in alignment with teachers’ perceptions and awareness. Additionally, the study will also explore how students deal with their writing challenges by making use of various resources are also being explored.

Importance of this Research

Informed by the research insights, writing instructors can gain a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical and cultural challenges, the frustrations, and the efforts of Chinese EAL students in the process of learning to write and thus provide them with pedagogical support. The insights gained may also inform course directors and curriculum developers in their decision-making about course design while contributing to the literature by examining EAP writing from an ecological perspective (theoretical framework).

Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an international Chinese student who speaks English as an additional language and are taking the first-year writing course [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

What is involved

(1) two sets of semi-structured interviews with each participant, conducted from September to December 2019; (2) Voluntary submissions of written assignments with teachers’ feedback detailing your ongoing experiences of learning to write academically; Those writing samples will be used for analysis only, which will help to inform the your challenges and progresses for completing your written assignments during the semester-long composition studies. None of your written work will be included in the results stemming from this research project, including a PhD dissertation,

publications, and/or presentations; (3) background surveys obtaining biographical and educational information.

Audio-tapes and-written notes will be taken during the interviews and a written transcription will be made.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time spent in the three interviews and filling out the background survey.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include a more complete understanding of the writing challenges and needs of these student populations and make progress by taking advantage of the available resources.

Compensation

As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given a \$10 gift card for the UVic bookstore. If you consent to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. If you would not participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used. You will not be asked to return the card or reimburse the amount of the gift card should you withdraw at any point in the study.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will ask for your ongoing consent at the beginning of each of the two interviews. I will also ask for ongoing permission during submission of your written assignments with instructors' feedback.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, all publication of any materials from this project will be completely anonymized, including your name and university affiliation.

Confidentiality

There is a limit to confidentiality based on the study's context (the potential small number of ENGL 135 instructors and one director). All digital files will be stored on the researchers password protected computer and one password protected external hard drive which will be stored in locked filing cabinets at the researchers home. All interviews will be transcribed or translated as necessary. These transcribed or translated files will be similarly saved on the researchers computer and copied to the external hard drive. Any physical copies of the interview transcriptions will be saved in a locked filing cabinet. All transcribed interview files will only use pseudonyms.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of published articles. Results from this study will also be presented at scholarly meetings.

Disposal of Data

All data, electronic and physical, will be stored for a minimum of 5 years from the completion of the study up to a maximum period of 10 years.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Jing Mao (Principal applicant), [jingmao@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:jingmao@[REDACTED]), or Dr. Michelle Wiebe (Principal Investigator) [mxw@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:mxw@[REDACTED]) or Dr. Tim Anderson (Principal Investigator) [timanderson@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:timanderson@[REDACTED]).

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the [REDACTED] (250-472-4545 or [ethics@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:ethics@[REDACTED])).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

_____ <i>Name of Participant</i>	_____ <i>Signature</i>	_____ <i>Date</i>
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A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D. Consent Form (Director/Instructor)

Director/Instructor Participant Consent Form

Difficult or Deficient?

Exploring the Academic Writing Needs and Challenges of First-year Chinese EAL Students at a Canadian University from an Ecological Perspective

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Difficult or Deficient? Exploring the Academic Writing Needs and Challenges of First-year Chinese EAL Students at a Canadian University from an Ecological Perspective” that is being conducted by Jing Mao, a Ph. D Candidate in the Faculty of Education.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in the Curriculum and Instruction Department in the Faculty of Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Wiebe and Dr. Tim Anderson. You may contact my supervisors at 250-721-7894 or 250-472-4290.

Purpose and Objectives

This study will investigate the needs and challenges involved in academic writing amongst Chinese students speaking English as an additional language (EAL) who take their first-year compulsory course () for academic writing at the University of Victoria. In addition, the study also intends to find out whether their identified needs and challenges in terms of academic writing are in alignment with teachers’ perception and awareness. Additionally, the study will also explore how students deal with their writing challenges by making use of various resources.

Importance of this Research

Informed by the research insights, writing instructors can gain a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical and cultural challenges, the frustrations, and the efforts of Chinese EAL students in the process of learning to write and provide them with pedagogical support. The insights gained may also inform course directors and curriculum developers in their decision-making about course design while contributing to the literature by examining EAP writing from an ecological perspective (theoretical framework).

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are in charge of or teaching the writing course ().

What is involved

- (1) participate in one face-to-face semi-structured interview in the September to December 2019 term.
- (2) fill out a background survey online.

Audio-tapes and-written notes will be taken during the interviews and a written transcription will be made.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time spent in the two interviews and filling out the background survey.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include becoming more aware of the writing needs and challenges of first-year Chinese EAL students in their university studies and thus provide them appropriate pedagogical support and skills to navigate their class time more efficiently.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, all publication of any materials from this project will be completely anonymized, including your name and university affiliation.

Confidentiality

There is a limit to confidentiality based on the study's context (due to the potential small number of [REDACTED] instructors and one director), although all available means to protect your anonymity will be ensured. All digital files will be stored on the researchers password protected computer and one password protected external hard drive which will be stored in locked filing cabinets at the researchers home. All interviews will be transcribed or translated as necessary. These transcribed or translated files will be similarly saved on the researchers computer and copied to the external hard drive. Any physical copies of the interview transcriptions will be saved in a locked filing cabinet. All transcribed interview files will only use pseudonyms.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of published articles. Results from this study will also be presented at scholarly meetings. You will also receive a 1-2 paragraph written summary outlining the study's major findings and dissemination plans by April 2020: four months following the end of data collection.

Disposal of Data

All data, electronic and physical, will be stored for a minimum of 5 years from the completion of the study up to a maximum period of 10 years.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Jing Mao (Principal applicant), [jingmao@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:jingmao@[REDACTED]), or Dr. Michelle Wiebe (Principal Investigator) [mxw@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:mxw@[REDACTED]) or Dr. Tim Anderson (Principal Investigator) [timanderson@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:timanderson@[REDACTED])

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E. Background Survey (Students)

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study, which aims to research the academic writing support for Chinese international students at the University of Victoria. You will be asked to fill in some biographical information, educational background information and some information about your studies at the university. Please fill out this survey and email it back to me at jingmao@uvic.ca. Your real identities will be kept confidential at all times. All the publications or presentations based on this research will only use your pseudonym. Your participation in this study is greatly valued.

General Information

1. Name: _____
2. Pseudonym (choose a non-identifiable name for use in this study): _____
3. Age: _____
4. Gender: _____
5. Country of Origin: _____
6. Current Citizenship Status: _____

Languages and Proficiency

7. Languages Spoken: _____
8. Years of Studying English: _____
9. General English Proficiency:

	Excellent	Good	Moderate	Weak	Very Weak
Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Listening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Speaking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. Which language skill do you think is the most important one for academic studies at University?

Reading ☐ Writing ☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ☐

11. Please use one or two sentences to explain the reasons:

Educational Information

12. Current Faculty and Department: _____

13. Current Discipline: _____

14. Previous Degree (s): _____

15. Have you attended any intensive English program or study for improving English writing before enrolling in your current degree study? Y ☐ N ☐

If yes, please specify the learning experiences briefly:

16. Have you attended Chinese Gao Kao before you were enrolled in the University?

Y ☐ N ☐

If no, please specify your experiences briefly:

17. The recent score of any English Test (including the test name):

Experiences about Academic Writing

18. Have you ever learned how to write academically in English before taking  ?

Y ☐ N ☐

19. Do you feel that writing academically is very challenging for you? Y ☐ N ☐

20. Do you think you need additional help or support from your instructors or peers?

Y ☐ N ☐

Appendix F. Interview Questions (Students)

A. First Interview

1. In general terms, how has your time in this university gone so far?
2. Have you experienced any academic challenges or barriers in your studies?
3. How often do you write in English in your daily life?
4. What do you think are the main differences between daily writing and academic writing?
5. Have you ever been taught how to write papers in your first language? If so, when and how?
6. Have you ever been taught how to write papers in English? If so, when and how?
7. What writing skills and knowledge have you learned so far from the course?
8. How does the reading of academic articles help you in academic writing?
9. What challenges have you experienced so far in your writing assignments (both in-class and out-of-class)?
10. Could you understand the writing expectations (such as class assignments or writing guidance) in the course clearly?
11. Do you feel satisfied with your academic writing so far? What are the parts of your writing that you feel good about or bad about?
12. Do you feel your language proficiency (will) affect your performance in the academic writing?
13. How do you feel being a Chinese EAL student in the class? What challenges do you think you've encountered or experienced being a first-year international student?
14. Have you consulted anyone (e.g., friends, the writing center) while writing and revising your assignments? How often do you do it?
15. What are your goals in the course for academic writing?

B. Second Interview:

1. Since our first interview, what sorts of changes, if any, have occurred regarding your academic writing here at the university?
2. What kind of writing skills or competence have you gained or developed from the course?
3. Do you feel your academic writing has improved, regressed, or stayed the same?
4. Which assignment for academic writing do you feel most challenging so far? Why?
5. Have you found the written feedback from the instructors to be helpful? How?
6. In what ways does the writing course support you in your subject learning?
7. Do you feel you have received enough support with your writing? Why or why not?
8. What writing-related support have you sought to obtain so far? (e.g., one-on-one writing tutoring, writing workshop)? How does it help or facilitate your studies?
9. For what writing skills or writing-related knowledge do you feel you need further support?
10. Based on the support and guidance you have received thus far in your program, what do you feel will be your biggest challenges for academic writing in the future? Do you feel prepared to advance to your next academic stage? What role does writing have in this process?

Appendix G. Background Survey (Director/Instructors)

General Information

1. Name: _____
2. Pseudonym (choose a non-identifiable name for use in this study): _____
3. Highest level of education (degree completed): ☐ Bachelors ☐ Masters ☐ Doctoral
4. Current academic rank: ☐ Full Professor ☐ Associate Professor
☐ Assistant professor ☐ Sessional Instructor

Languages Background Information

5. First Language Spoken: _____
6. Additional languages you've spoken in order of proficiency (from high to low)

7. Have you traveled or lived in China or where Mandarin Chinese is spoken?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Professional Information

8. Language teaching related diplomas or certificates received (if applicable):

9. Years of teaching academic writing: _____
10. Have you received /attended any professional training (e.g., workshops) related to second language or international students? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Experiences with Teaching International Students

11. Have you ever taught international students? ☐ Yes ☐ No
12. Have you ever taught Chinese international/ EAL students? ☐ Yes ☐ No
13. What characteristics have you used to identify Chinese international/EAL students?
 (Please check all that apply)
☐ Appearance
☐ Spoken language (e.g., accent, fluency, vocabulary)

☐ Written language (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, organizations)

☐ Other (please explain)

14. How many Chinese international/ EAL students do you estimate are in your class(es) this semester? _____

15. Do you think the majority of those students in your class (es) need additional support or accommodation for their academic writing? ☐ Yes ☐ No

16. Do you feel you need additional support or professional development to teach second language or international students? ☐ Yes ☐ No

17. Do you believe that you should provide additional support to international students?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments (optional):

--

Appendix H. Interview Questions (Director/Instructor)

1. Could you please introduce your teaching goals in the course for academic reading and writing?
2. How long have you been teaching first-year composition courses?
3. Have you taught composition courses other than ENGL 135? What are the courses?
4. What training have you received to teach academic writing?
5. Have you noted an increase in the number of Chinese EAL students in your ENGL135 in recent years?
6. How many Chinese EAL students are there in each of your classes this semester?
7. Do you find first language and EAL students have different needs and challenges in their first-year writing?
8. How would you describe their presence and performance in your course?
9. What are the main academic writing challenges for Chinese EAL students in this course?
 - a. Do you think they vary greatly in their English proficiencies?
 - b. How does their general language competence impact their performance in their academic writing?
 - c. What supports or accommodations are in place for them in this writing course?
 - d. Should there be special or additional support to account for the needs and challenges encountered by Chinese EAL students?
10. What other available resources in the university do you recommend to students to gain further support for improving their academic writing?
11. As a course instructor, what role do you play in assisting the students with their written academic development?
12. How do you provide written feedback to EAL students?
13. How do you expect your feedback to help students improve their academic writing?
14. Do you feel it is important to connect your students with their various cultures and language proficiencies through writing tasks?
15. Do you think Chinese students change the dynamic of your class and the instruction in your class? If so, please provide reasons.
16. What support or resources do you feel you need in order to work with Chinese EAL students in your classes more effectively?

17. Would you like to improve your instructional approaches, methods, or materials for teaching academic writing in the future? If so, how?

Appendix I. Ethics Certificate of Approval

Office of Research Services | Human
Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC
V8W 2Y2 Canada T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Certificate of Approval

Wiebe (Supervisor) PRINCIPAL

ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER Expedited
review - delegated

18-1124

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR **Michelle**

APPLICANT **Jing Mao**

ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE 05-Apr-2019

PhD student

APPROVED ON 05-Apr-2019 APPROVAL

UVIC DEPARTMENT **Curriculum & Instruction**

EXPIRY DATE 04-Apr-2020

PROJECT TITLE **Difficult or Deficient? Exploring the Academic Writing Needs and Challenges of First-year Chinese EAL Students at a Canadian University from an Ecological Perspective**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS

Tim Anderson - Principle Investigator, Faculty

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING **None**

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL

Consent Form(Group 2,3).doc - 02-Apr-2019
Consent Form (Group 1).doc - 02-Apr-2019
invitation letter (Group 2).docx - 01-Mar-2019
Recruitment Poster (Group 3).docx - 28-Feb-2019
Recruitment Poster (Group 1).docx - 28-Feb-2019
Interview questions (Group 2,3).docx - 28-Feb-2019
Interview questions (Group 1).docx - 28-Feb-2019
Background survey (Group 2,3).docx - 28-Feb-2019
Background survey (Group 1).docx - 28-Feb-2019

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications

To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals

Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures

When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the [REDACTED] Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all

respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

Dr. Rachael Scarth
Associate VP Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 05-April

