

A Study Investigating the Role of English Medium Schooling in EAP Writing at Higher Education Level

Monalisha

Abstract

The level of English exposure, such as native vs non-native and novice vs expert, has been essential in analyzing and contextualizing EAP writing. The research studies argue that EAP writing can be learnt through expert-guided practice. Moreover, studies have shown that focused practice can bring one closer to being an expert writer in relation to a novice EAP writer. However, in an ESL country like India, with all students as non-native and novice EAP writers, there exists a notion that EMI schooling improves EAP performance at the higher education level. This paper, through a questionnaire survey (n=55) conducted among research scholars enrolled at six Central Universities in India, dispels this myth and highlights a complex composition of the medium of school education at the tertiary level. The paper concludes with a recommendation to consider the students' varied levels of English medium exposure for EAP course development without following the bias.

Keywords: EAP writing, English medium, higher education, India.

Introduction

Research on EAP writing notes that novice student academic writers, both native and non-native English users, require expert-guided explicit support and acculturation to efficiently learn and practise academic English writing (Lea & Street, 2000; Zhao, 2017). Moreover, the non-native novice student EAP writers transferring to English medium

universities face additional language-based (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Evans, 2018) and discourse-based difficulties (Canagarajah & Jerskey, 2009).

In addition to the non-nativity and beginner aspect of EAP writing, the students in English medium higher education of non-anglophone countries are faced with language complexities in their immediate national environments. For example, Gargesh and Dev (2017) and Niranjana (2013) recognize the significance and value of the English language as a 'silent gateway' and as an assessment criterion at higher education institutions in the country. However, the students' perception of such language gaps remains largely unexplored. Only select studies, such as Kumar (2014b), underline students' underdeveloped EAP writing performances and attribute it to non-English medium school education and a generally limited exposure to English.

In the absence of any EAP teaching and instruction in India, the popular notion is that an EMI student will perform better in EAP writing than a non-EMI student. This study dispels this myth and asserts that English medium education does not warrant a better EAP writing performance as difficulties faced by English and non-English medium students in EAP writing overlap. Moreover, the survey reports that students come from a varied composition of medium of instruction backgrounds, indicating a varied exposure to general English. The study, thus, recommends that such varied exposure must be considered as the point of departure in EAP course development and pedagogy at the higher education level.

Literature Review

The nativity of the writer has been one of the founding concerns in EAP writing research. The wide circulation of English as a commercial lingua franca and as the language of international scholarly communication due to the rise of globalization and internationalization of higher education, beginning in the 1960s, inspired the research on EAP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Early EAP research such as Herbert (1965) and Ewer and Latorre (1969) describe the discursal and grammatical nature of 'standard' EAP writing from textbooks and articles directed primarily towards non-native (ESL and EFL) users of English in an internationalized higher education system mainly in anglophone countries, such as the USA and UK (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001).

Additionally, studies focusing on student writing compare the structure of native and non-native EAP writing against the relatively standard structure (Biber et al., 2011; Ansarifard et al., 2018) and highlight the difficulties faced by non-native writers in EAP writing (Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Morrison & Evans, 2018).

In contrast to studies highlighting the difficulties in EAP writing faced by non-native writers due to factors like developing grammatical and lexical repertoire in English, the distinct nature of academic register, and primary cultural differences, Hyland (2016) brings a rejuvenated attention to an EAP writer's native speaker status. Hyland (2016) argues that the linguistic disadvantage of the non-native EAP writer over the native EAP writer is a myth, as it neutralizes the efforts that the latter has to put in. A score of studies, however, argue against this from different standpoints. For example, Flowerdew (2019) highlights that although native and non-native writers may share some problems in EAP writing, non-native writers face additional challenges in building and utilizing their linguistic resources. Politzer-Ahles et al. (2020) substantiate this argument by highlighting that non-native EAP writers are subject to more harsh peer reviews compared to their native counterparts by the "literacy brokers" (Lillis & Curry, 2006, p. 3).

The EAP research distinguishes between expert and novice EAP writers. For example, expert writers make more varied use of formulaic expressions such as: *by and large*, on the other hand, as opposed to novice writers (Wray, 1999; Wang, 2016). The novice academic writers, on the other hand, more commonly employ spoken versions of formulaic expressions (Wang, 2018) and more verb phrase-based bundles, an essential feature of conversational register, than prepositional and noun phrase-based bundles in comparison to the expert writers (Zhang et al., 2021). These studies highlight and recommend the need for academic language development for all novice EAP writers through formal training (Pérez-Llantada, 2014).

Apart from select studies conducted in a non-native country like China (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Evans, 2018), non-native novice writers addressed in these studies are situated in anglophone countries. Therefore, barely touching on their immediate social and linguistic reality, the relevance of the abovementioned findings for student writers in India is limited to the recommendation that they require supplementary instruction for EAP development.

To elaborate, English in India is a socioeconomic and cultural capital (see Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007; Agnihotri, 2001). Complementing the English education demand, popular access to English education became possible with the onset of privatization in the 1990s (Tilak, 2002; Kumar, 2014a). Since then, private schools have been one of the biggest caterers of English (medium) education. Although schools, nationwide, teach English as a compulsory language following the *three-language formula* (Sridhar & Kachru, 2000, p. 162), unhindered by the unregulated fee structure at private schools, the enrolment in private English medium schools increased by 38.5 per cent and fell by 14.5 per cent in government schools (Kingdon, 2020). Moreover, irrespective of the majority of the students' enrolment in government schools, i.e., 58.87 per cent of the total primary school (from Class 1 to 8) students (Department of School Education and Literacy, 2022), and successive education policies' (Ministry of Education, 1968, 1986; Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2020) consistent recommendations to use regional languages as medium of instruction at the higher education level, the primary language of instruction and assessment at higher education institutions continues to be English.

The greatly evolving higher education requires the students, variously exposed to English, to perform in different genres of EAP without recognizing the pertinent gap between students' prior exposure to English and EAP writing requirements. Therefore, this study brings attention to the language complexities students face in EAP writing by dispelling the popular myth that English medium schooling improves EAP performance in higher education.

Methodology and Analysis

To investigate whether English medium schooling improves students' engagement with EAP at the higher education level, the questionnaire survey assesses (n=55) students' EAP writing experiences against their medium of instruction backgrounds. Crucially, the survey responses suggest that English medium schooling merely impacts students' use of English for General Purposes and not English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This finding is contrary to Kumar's (2014b) report that owing to non-English medium schooling and limited time exposure to English, students demonstrate low proficiency in general English, which effectively causes low proficiency in academic English.

Methodology

The questionnaire survey listed twenty sentences (mentioned in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5) grouped under the following four themes:

1. English for General vs Academic Purposes
2. Structural Engagement
3. Conceptual Engagement
4. Reading to Write

The thematic classification has captured four important aspects of academic writing, especially for non-native novice student writers:

1. Preferred language in the academic context
2. Knowledge of structural coherence
3. Genre knowledge
4. Academic reading

A total of 55 research scholars from six Central Universities in India responded (online and offline) to the survey. The survey participants were divided into three groups based on their medium of instruction at the three levels of schooling (Table 1). The three levels of schooling are Primary (I to V), Upper Primary to Secondary (VI to X), and Higher Secondary (XI-XII) (NCERT, 2016). The English medium student participants were encoded as *Group E*, non-English medium student participants as *Group I*, and the participants who changed their medium of instruction midway were encoded as *Group IE*. The participant classification is laid out below.

Table 1: *Classification of Participants Based on the Medium of Instruction*

Participant Groups	Medium of School Education at Primary Level	Medium of School Education between Upper Primary and Secondary Level	Medium of School education at Higher Secondary Level
Group I	Non-English	Non-English	Non-English
Group E	English	English	English
Group IE	A mixed combination of Non-English and English medium schooling		

Responses to the questionnaire were recorded on a five-point Likert scale

of agreement-disagreement as *strongly disagree* (1), *Disagree* (2), *Neither agree nor disagree* (3), *Agree* (4) or *strongly agree* (5). Response means were subsequently calculated using SPSS, which have been compared and analyzed below. The comparative analysis of the mean is based on a 0.80 range of analysis, i.e., the mean value 1–1.80 means ‘strongly disagree,’ 1.81–2.60 means ‘disagree,’ 2.61–3.40 means ‘neither agree nor disagree’ 3.41–4.20 means ‘agree,’ and 4.20–5 means ‘strongly agree.’

Mean Comparison Analysis and Discussion

English for General vs Academic Purposes

The sentences under theme one, *English for General vs Academic Purposes*, explore students’ preference for English use in informal contexts, such as diary entries, compared to academic contexts, such as making notes. More specifically, it investigates if non-English medium students prefer writing in their native language more than English, especially for academic purposes.

Table 2: *English for General vs Academic Purposes*

	Group I (n=20)	Group E (n=19)	Group IE (n=16)
1. I often write in my native language.	2.95	1.89	3.31
2. I often write in my free time in English.	3.80	4.05	3.38
3. I am more comfortable with a bilingual dictionary.		3.40 3.26 3.62	
4. I make notes in English.	4.45	4.68	4.25

The response to sentences 1 and 2 by all three groups indicate a general preference for writing English for general purposes against the native language. Additionally, reliance on a bilingual dictionary among the three groups is higher than writing in the native language (Sentence 1). In the academic context, however, there is a strong agreement among all three groups on using English. These responses, therefore, contrary to the hypothesis, indicate that non-English medium students, like English medium students, equally prefer using English for general and academic purposes.

Moreover, among the three groups, Group E showed the highest

agreement to using English for General Purposes, while Groups I and IE showed higher scores than Group E in using their native language for general purposes. This suggests the non-English medium students' familiarity with native language is used for general purposes and not for academic purposes.

Structural Engagement

To highlight students' engagement with the language use at the word and sentence level, the sentences under theme 2 (Table 3) investigate if non-English medium students face more difficulty in employing appropriate vocabulary, grammatical structure, sentences, paragraphs, and organization of ideas. These focused sentences are based on the pre-identified areas of difficulties in EAP writing for non-native students in their native countries (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Evans, 2018).

Table 3: *Structural Engagement*

	Group I (n=20)	Group E (n=19)	Group IE (n=16)
5. I always look for newer and bigger words in the English-English dictionary to make my writing more academic.	3.50	3.58	3.63
6. I find newer words from articles and books and use them in my academic write-up.	4.05	3.89	4.13
7. While writing, I am only concerned about correct sequence (e.g., literature review, data, methodology) and correct grammar.	3.50	3.11	3.88
8. I depend on spell-checker and grammar software (e.g., Grammarly) for all kinds of editing.	3.35	3.37	3.44
9. I write longer sentences to make my writing more formal and informative.	3.55	3.11	3.38
10. I quote sentences from articles or books rather than paraphrasing them.	3.05	3.11	3.13
11. I report a different finding in each sentence in my paragraphs to make a paragraph more informative.	3.05	3.11	3.50
12. The first sentence of each paragraph in my writing will tell the reader what the paragraph is about.	3.55	3.58	3.56

To employ diverse and precise vocabulary in EAP writing, all three groups, i.e., I, E, and IE, rely on academic sources, such as dictionaries and research articles. Groups I and IE agree that they are only concerned with correct organization and grammar, while Group E remains neutral. Only the group IE agrees to depending on spell-checker and grammar software for editing while the I and E remain neutral. There is a similarly mixed response to writing long sentences for information packaging to which group I agrees and the groups E and IE remain neutral. Notably, none of the groups agrees that they prefer quoting sentences rather than paraphrasing, a difficult area for non-native student EAP writers (Morrison & Evans, 2018). Additionally, while all three groups agree that the first sentence in a paragraph tells the reader about the paragraph, only group IE agrees that they report a different finding in each sentence of a paragraph. Group I and E are, in fact, equally likely of writing a topic sentence in a paragraph.

The participant responses to sentences in Table 3 highlight three important points. One, the participants have a certain degree of familiarity with English and the EAP. Two, the participant groups have limited knowledge of structural and informational coherence brought about through appropriate grammatical use. Three, the knowledge of the structural and informational organization in EAP writing is not distinct for participants from English and non-English medium schools.

Conceptual Engagement

Genre awareness contributes towards better EAP writing performance, especially for non-native student EAP writers (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). Thus, the third theme investigated if English medium EAP writers are more aware of certain genres and are more comfortable with information identification in certain genres than the non-English medium participants.

Table 4: *Conceptual Engagement*

	Group I (n=20)	Group E (n=19)	Group IE (n=16)
13. <i>I am confused about the difference between summary and review.</i>	1.95	2.37	2.06
14. <i>I get confused about the difference between introduction and conclusion, so I repeat the contents in these sections.</i>	1.90	2.11	2.19

15. <i>It is easier for me if the professor provides a topic for an academic write-up rather than choosing a topic by myself.</i>	2.60	3.37	3.13
16. <i>I have difficulty identifying keywords in my academic write-up.</i>	2.50	2.42	2.63
17. <i>I only write what I read in books and articles without adding anything I already know.</i>	2.35	2.32	2.44

The survey responses indicate that none of the participant groups is confused between central genres such as summary-review and introduction-conclusion, confirming a certain degree of genre awareness. Similarly, all three participant groups equally disagree that topic identification for an academic write-up or keyword identification is difficult. These responses are not determined by their medium of school education. Moreover, it allows the participants from all three groups to add contemporary, relevant information to their academic writing (sentence 17).

Reading to Write

Reading is the first step towards academic writing and academic literacy (Wingate, 2016), which both constructs and informs an academic text. Therefore, the third theme investigated if English medium students find academic reading easier than non-English medium students and if they are more methodical in academic reading than non-English medium students.

Table 5: *Reading to Write*

	Group I (n=20)	Group E (n=19)	Group IE (n=16)
18. <i>I find the language used in academic articles difficult to read.</i>	2.65	2.74	2.87
19. <i>I collect reading materials only after I know the topic of my academic write-up.</i>	3.60	3.74	3.56
20. <i>I end up with lots of reading materials at the time of writing because reading them takes a lot of time.</i>	3.50	3.79	3.44

In response to sentence 18, all three groups, I, E, and IE, remain neutral about facing difficulty in academic reading. The same participants, in sentence 20, however, almost equally agree that reading academic texts

takes much time. Moreover, there is a strong agreement among the three over collecting reading materials only after they know the topic of their academic write-up.

The responses in Table 5 identify that academic reading is a time-taking rather than a difficult task for students irrespective of their medium of schooling.

To summarize, the survey findings make the following affirmations:

1. English and non-English medium students report similar difficulties in EAP writing, which also coincide with the difficulties faced by non-native student academic writers in other countries (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Evans, 2018). Therefore, English medium schooling does not improve students' EAP performance at the higher education level.
2. The student population in India, across the mediums of instruction, has a certain level of English knowledge used for both general and academic purposes.

In addition, to empirically understand the reality of English medium schooling in terms of EAP writing performance and pedagogy we must look at the trend of enrolment. The following section discusses the numbers.

Percentage Enrolment in English and Non-English Medium Schools

To precisely understand the English medium exposure of the students, the respondents of the questionnaire survey also provided the details of their medium of school education. The following figures show the changing demography of EMI and non-EMI school enrolments.

Figure 1: *Medium of Instruction at Different Stages (Source: AISES, NCERT, 2016, p. 29)*

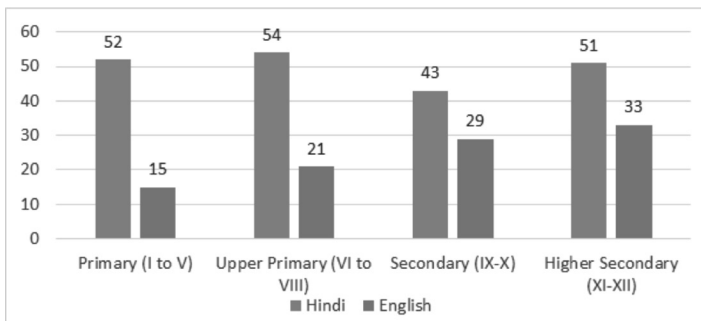
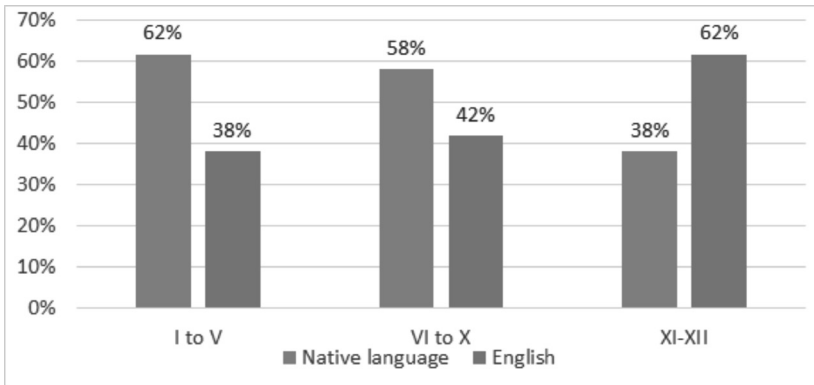


Figure 1, as reported in the Eighth All India School Education Survey (2016), shows that the percentage of student enrolment in English medium schools doubles by the time they reach higher secondary school. Similarly, Figure 2 (below) confirms this report by showing that the percentage of enrolment between the native language and English medium almost reverses by the time students reach the higher secondary level.

Figure 2: Medium of Instruction at Different Stages (n=55)



The findings reported in Figures 1 and 2 indicate that a significant number of students shift to English medium schools before they reach higher education. This shift is arguably to attain the social and economic benefits associated with the language. For example, the apparent relevance of English in sectors like legislature, media, and education (Agnihotri, 2001; Daswani, 2001) and the economic returns at national (Azam et al., 2011) and international levels (see Faust & Nagar, 2001) regulates the increased EMI enrolments.

In addition to rendering a blended exposure to English and local language medium of education, students' shift to English medium schools with advancing levels of education indicates their preparation to meet educational and employment demands, with English as a 'silent gatekeeper'. The students, as such, arrive at higher education institutions and need pedagogical assistance grounded in their social and cultural realities for critical EAP writing development.

Conclusion

The study indicates that policy-regulated English language teaching

across schools in India acculturates students to a certain level of English suitable for general purposes, irrespective of the medium of education. As such, the students from both English and non-English medium schools report similar understanding and difficulties in EAP writing without being impacted by the medium of instruction at school.

The students at higher education institutions in India constitute a complex mix of mediums of school education to prepare themselves for education and employment demands. Therefore, this paper suggests that, to address the difficulties faced by students in EAP writing, the EAP course developers and instructors must be cognizant of and address students' varied levels of English exposure for critical EAP writing development.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that the questionnaire survey is based on a relatively small number of participants due to the low interest of the students in disclosing their EAP writing skills. Similar studies with a larger participation, representative of the nationwide student population, can further validate the negligible role of English medium schooling in better EAP writing.

References

- Agnihotri, R. K. (2001). English in Indian education. In C. J. Daswani (Ed.), *Language education in multilingual India* (pp. 186-209). UNESCO.
- Ansarifar, A., Shahriari, H., & Pishghadam, R. (2018). Phrasal complexity in academic writing: A comparison of abstracts written by graduate students and expert writers in applied linguistics. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 31, 58-71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2017.12.008>.
- Azam, M., Chin, A., & Prakash, N. (2013). The returns to English-language skills in India. *Economic development and cultural change*, 61(2), 335-367.
- Biber, D., Gray, B., & Poonpon, K. (2011). Should we use characteristics of conversation to measure grammatical complexity in L2 writing development? *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(1), 5-35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41307614>.
- Canagarajah, S., & Jerskey, M. (2009). Meeting the needs of advanced multilingual writers. In *The Sage handbook of writing development* (pp. 472-488).
- Daswani, C. J. (2001). Introduction. In C. J. Daswani (Ed.), *Language education in multilingual India* (pp. XI-XVIII). UNESCO.
- Department of School Education and Literacy. (2022). *Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+)*. Ministry of Education, Government of India.

- Ewer, J. R., & Latorre, G. (1969). *A course in basic scientific English*. Longman.
- Faust, D., & Nagar, R. (2001). Politics of development in postcolonial India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(30), 2878-2883.
- Flowerdew, J. (2019). The linguistic disadvantage of scholars who write in English as an additional language: Myth or reality. *Language Teaching*, 52(2), 249-260.
- Flowerdew, J., & Peacock, M. (2001). Issues in EAP: A preliminary perspective. In J. Flowerdew, & M. Peacock (Eds.), *Research perspectives on English for academic purposes* (pp. 8-24). Cambridge University Press.
- Gargesh, R. & Dev, A. N. (2017). English in tertiary education in India: A Janus-faced perspective with special reference to the University of Delhi. In E. S. Park & B. Spolsky (Eds.), *English education at the tertiary level in Asia from policy to practice* (pp. 46-64). Routledge.
- Herbert, A. J. (1965). *The structure of technical english*. Longman Group Limited.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2016). Academic publishing and the myth of linguistic injustice. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 31, 58-69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2016.01.005>
- Kingdon, G. (2020). The private schooling phenomenon in India: A review. *The Journal of Developmental Studies*, 56(10), 1795-1817.
- Kirkpatrick, R., & Bui, T. T. N. (2016). Introduction: The challenges for English education policies in Asia. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language policy in Asia* (pp. 1-24). Springer International Publishing.
- Kumar, A. (2014a). Privatisation of school education: A social welfare program or industry for profit. *European Academic Research*, 2(1), 1541-1559.
- Kumar, P. (2014b). Effect of proficiency in English language on academic performance of post graduate management students of Marathwada region (Maharashtra), India. *IOSR Journal of Business Management*, 16(5), 10-16.
- Lea, M. & Street, B. (2000). Student writing and staff feedback in higher education. In M. Lea and B. Street (Eds.), *Student writing in higher education: New contexts*. Society for Research in Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2006). Professional academic writing by multilingual scholars: Interactions with literacy brokers in the production of English medium texts. *Written Communication*, 23(1), 3-35.
- Ministry of Education. (1968). *National Policy on Education*. Government of India.
- Ministry of Education. (1986). *National Policy on Education*. Government of India.
- Ministry of Human Resources Development. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.
- Morrison, B. (2014). Challenges faced by non-native undergraduate student writers in an English-medium university. *The Asian ESP Journal*, 10(1), 137-175.

- Morrison, B., & Evans, S. (2018). Supporting non-native speaker student writers making the transition from school to an English-medium university. *Journal of Language Learning and Higher Education*, 8(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cercles-2018-0001>
- National Council of Educational Research and Training. (2016). *Eighth all India school education survey*. Publication Division, NCERT.
- Nesi, H., & Gardner, S. (2012). *Genres across the disciplines: Student writing in higher education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Niranjana, T. (1990). Translation, colonialism, and rise of English. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25(15), 773-779.
- Pérez-Llantada, C. (2014). Formulaic language in L1 and L2 expert academic writing: Convergent and divergent usage. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 14, 84-94.
- Politzer-Ahles, S., Holliday, J. J., Girolamo, T., Spsychalska, M., & Berkson, K. H. (2016). Is linguistic injustice a myth? A response to Hyland. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 34, 3-8.
- Sridhar, K. K., & Kachru, Y. (2000). Literacy, minority languages, and multilingual India. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 30(1), 149-165.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2002). Privatization of higher education in India. *International Higher Education*, 11-13.
- Tsui, A. B. M., & Tollefson, J. W. (2007). *Language policy, culture, and identity in Asian contexts*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Wang, Y. (2016). *The idiom principle and L1 influence: A contrastive learner-corpus study of delexical verb + noun collocations*. John Benjamins.
- Wang, Y. (2018). *As Hill seems to suggest: Variability in formulaic sequences with interpersonal functions in L1 novice and expert academic writing*. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 33, 12-23.
- Wingate, U. (2016). Academic literacy across the curriculum: Towards a collaborative instructional approach. *Language Teaching*, 51(3), 349-364.
- Wray, A. (1999). Formulaic language in learners and native speakers. *Language Teaching*, 32(4), 213-231.
- Zhang, S., Yu, H., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Understanding the sustainable growth of EFL students' Writing skills: Differences between novice and expert writers in their use of lexical bundles in academic writing. *Sustainability*, 13(5553). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13105553>
- Zhao, J. (2017). Native speaker advantage in academic writing? Conjunctive realizations in EAP writing by four groups of writers. *Ampersand*, 4, 47-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2017.07.001>

Monalisha is a PhD scholar at the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad.
monalisha13b@gmail.com