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# L2 learners' experiences with reading and writing and their perceptions of the connections between the skills

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A Thesis

entitled

L2 Learners' Experiences with Reading and Writing and their Perceptions of the  
Connections Between the Skills

by

Michelle Danielle Fowler

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in English

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May 2016

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An Abstract of

L2 Learners' Experiences with Reading and Writing and their Perceptions of the  
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A great deal of recent scholarship has re-focused on the neglected reading-writing connection, moving from viewing reading and writing as two separate entities to being seen as closely-inter-related skills. This realization has had an effect on some of the ways reading and writing lessons are implemented in classrooms, and on the students in those classrooms. Incorporating reading-writing tasks in the classroom can affect students in different ways when learning a language. This qualitative, exploratory study seeks to find out: (1) what experiences L2 students have had with reading-to-write and writing-to-read tasks; (2) how they perceive the tasks; (3) which tasks they prefer/do not prefer and why; and (4) how students feel the tasks affect their learning. Through interviewing students in advanced class levels of their second language (English or Spanish), the present study has found that most L2 students shared similar experiences and perceptions of the tasks, as well as experiences with how the tasks were implemented in their courses.

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## Preface

The skills of reading and writing and their related tasks used in the learning environment have a complex history. In *Writing and reading relationships: Constructive tasks*, Langer & Filhan (2000) state that reading and writing used to be seen as separate skills that were *possibly* related, and because of this were taught separately. Reading was seen as a passive skill, while writing was active (Hirvela, 2004, p.9). It wasn't until the 1970s/1980s that people really started to examine the connections between the two and began seeing them as integrated. Stotsky (1983) argues that research on reading and writing skills was spurred by the realization that those who were categorized as better writers were also found to be better readers and spent more time reading than others (as cited in Hirvela, 2004, p. 13). Since then, many studies have provided support for the idea that reading and writing should be taught together because they are, as Grabe & Kaplan (1996, p.297) state, “reciprocal activities; the outcome of a reading activity can serve as input for writing, and writing can lead a student to further reading resources” (quoted in Hirvela, 2004, p. 13). It was determined by Langer & Filhan that many researchers agree one of the biggest ways these skills are connected is via composing meaning. One of said researchers, Hirvela (2004), states that reading and writing are “productive, meaning-making activities utilizing many of the same composing skills, during a process in which reading informs writing and writing informs reading” (p. 42). Some studies show that writers try to act as readers so they can have a better understanding of their audience, while readers try to act as writers so they can have a better understanding of the text's meaning; on top of that, it has been documented that writers tend to use similar, if not the same, structures they saw when reading texts before writing (Langer & Filhan, 2000).

Once the skills were seen as integrated, educators began implementing reading and writing tasks together in the classroom. Today, most of these learning tasks can be categorized as follows: reading-to-write tasks and writing-to-read tasks. In these phrases *reading to write* and *writing to read*, the first skill stated is the one that supports/shapes/directs the second skill stated (Hirvela, 2004). According to Ferris & Hedgcock (2014), reading-to-write tasks involve using pieces students have read as writing materials, while writing-to-read tasks involve writing at different points in the reading process in order to better make sense of the information being read.

Hirvela (2004) dives deeper into these task descriptions by stating that, when it comes to reading-to-write tasks, the input one receives when reading in the target language can actually influence one's writing development. In this sense, you are reading first and then that action of reading has an effect on your writing; in other words, you are using reading materials as a basis for writing. Hirvela quotes Krashen's (1984, p. 20) belief that "it is reading that gives the writer the 'feel' for the look and texture of reader-based prose" (2004, p. 112). Krashen contends that the learner can subconsciously learn the target language's rules/conventions when it comes to writing simply by reading in the target language. The goal in the classroom is to have students not only learn about the subject they are reading about, but also learn about writing itself.

When it comes to writing-to-read tasks, Hirvela (2004) asserts the reason for writing to read is that "writing before, during, or after reading enables a reader to make sense of her or his reading, which in turn strengthens the quality of the reading and contributes to the development of L2 reading skills" (2004, p. 74). Hirvela explains readers can write during or after reading in order to make sense of what they read/are

reading, and states that it helps the reader better get a feel for where they stand with their interpretations and ideas. Also, when students write notes to themselves, such as questions or comments about what is happening in a story, they are improving their reading through writing; the same can be said for simply underlining or highlighting words/sentences. Writing can help readers organize their thoughts and can also help them focus more on what they are reading (Hirvela, 2004).

The present study will add to the knowledge of the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) when it comes to incorporating reading and writing tasks in a classroom. The present study will illustrate the experiences of L2 students with these tasks and how they perceive the effects they have on learning.

## **Chapter One**

### **Literature Review**

This study will focus on students' perceptions of reading and writing skills and their connections in an L2. Participants will consist of twelve students, both male and female, at The University of Toledo and the American Language Institute who have had experience in advanced English as a Second Language classes or advanced Spanish as a Foreign Language classes. The participants will be interviewed about their experiences reading and writing in their L2 and will be asked about their associated views.

#### **Reading-to-Write Tasks: Effects on Writing Skills.**

The present study will examine students' perceptions and experiences with reading-to-write tasks. Affirmed by research, reading-to-write tasks increase students' writing competency and abilities. According to Carson (1993), reading-to-write tasks are activities that deal with any literacy event "in which readers/writers use text(s) that they read, or have read, as a basis for texts that they write" (quoted in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013, p. 102). There are multiple reasons instructors implement these tasks in the classroom, as studies have found they yield positive effects. For one, reading materials are used to provide the writer with more information about the subject on which they are writing; however, Kroll (1993) declares "one can read a text not only to 'learn' its content but to 'learn' choices that writers have made in producing it" (quoted in Hirvela, 2004, p.113). Hirvela (2004) affirms,

"Instead of assigning texts because of the information about a subject they can provide writers, we can also take into account the texts' value as sources of knowledge or input about writing itself. Ideally, we'll want our

developing L2 writers to learn about writing itself — not just the subject at hand — through what they read” (p. 113).

Regarding this same idea, Krashen (1984) argues reading materials provide input for students so they can subconsciously get a feel for the “look and texture of reader-based prose” (quoted in Hirvela, 2004, p. 112). Krashen argues that when students absorb the “look and texture” subconsciously, there is no organized instruction about how to analyze structures of texts, and the students are not informed that is what they are doing; they are unaware that as they read, they are able to gather ways to improve their writing. In the present study, we will be able to see whether or not the participants notice effects of reading-to-write tasks on their language skills.

One idea the current study explores is the conscious transfer of writing structures and features. When students read texts before they write, it has been shown in some studies that they are able to consciously transfer the structures from the texts to their own writings. In previous research studies, the conscious transfer of structures is usually seen after guided analysis in the classroom has been discussed. After organized instruction of how to properly analyze the texts, the students complete writing tasks and use the information they learned through the analysis period. For example, Negretti & Kuteeva (2011) found that after reading and consciously analyzing the rhetorical structures and characteristics of the academic texts through organized instruction, the students were able to look at their own academic writing and apply what they had observed (p. 108). Cheng (2006) also discovered that the student in this study, after analyzing texts of specific genre/discipline through organized instruction and a focus on academic criticism, pulled both the indirect criticism approach from the academic articles and the direct criticism

approach from his “awareness of the rhetorical and disciplinary contexts of academic writing” and used them in his own writing (p. 300). (In this study, *indirect criticism* refers to when authors “hide their negative feelings behind positive or neutral words”, while *direct criticism* contains words of explicit, broad criticism (p. 292).) Cheng also reports the student “consistently and meaningfully explored the features of academic criticism in his analysis of the writing samples and enacted it rather consciously in his writing” (2006, p. 302). According to Krashen (1984), subconsciously transferring textual structures/features from readings to writings has led to positive effects, but moving this to the conscious mind can improve writing/learning output and instruction. The present study will add to these ideas of conscious/subconscious learning when it comes to reading-to-write tasks by providing information on students’ perceptions.

It has been revealed in some studies that the purpose of the reading-to-write task affects student engagement, and students’ preferences of these tasks are an element of the present study. When the students have a purpose for writing, it can affect how they engage with the reading. In a study performed by McCulloch (2013) with a naturalistic context, the student working on the critical review of literature section of their dissertation engaged with the text being read in a more critical way, questioning source credibility and looking for connections between texts. The other student, who was working on writing their methodology section, engaged with an attitude that was in agreement with the texts’ information (McCulloch, 2013). The reason a student has for writing can affect how the student engages with the text being read, and the preferences we learn of through the present study will add to this field.

Some research has concluded that the choice of topic can affect engagement of students and how they view these tasks, and their perceptions of these effects are investigated in the present study. Many instructors are wary of allowing students to choose their own reading materials when it comes to reading-to-write tasks because they believe students are not capable of selecting their own materials for learning a new language and do not see the benefits of allowing this (Li-Te, 2012). However, in Li-Ti's study, results showed that allowing the students to choose their own reading materials not only surprised researchers and instructors because the chosen materials were just as good as (if not better than) the texts normally assigned, but also because it improved student engagement and writing products. According to Li-Te (2012), text themes and genres chosen were more diverse, longer, and more related to student interests and concerns than the texts normally assigned by instructors, and the "students read these novels thoroughly and wrote their summary and responses wholeheartedly" (p. 52). The students were fully engaged in the readings and completely understood the content, as the writings were very thorough and contained more information than normal. Therefore, through research and studies we can determine that student engagement can be affected in positive ways by these types of tasks in the L2 classroom. The present study will expand on this focus of student engagement with reading-to-write tasks, as the students will provide information on which classroom tasks they prefer and why, as well as how they feel it affects their learning in general.

Asking students about their task preferences and overall perceptions during the present study will provide more information in this area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Some studies have found that reading-to-write tasks also can affect the student

through the text medium of the reading material. Some studies show that the medium of the text — in other words, whether students read the text online or in print — can affect how well the student does on the writing portion of the assignment. Through their study on student essay performance depending on text medium, De Rycker & Ponnudurai (2011) uncovered that the presentation mode of reading materials for reading-to-write tasks “influences the way student writers develop and formulate their thesis statements, support them and/or challenge them with counter-arguments” (p. 156). Though the present study does not specifically involve the medium of texts, it does examine how students perceive the importance of completing these tasks, which is parallel to other studies aforementioned.

### **Writing-to-Read Tasks: Effects on Reading Skills.**

This study also focuses on students’ perceptions of writing-to-read tasks. Hirvela (2004) states that writing-to-read tasks can include summarizing, synthesizing, pre-reading writing, response statements, response essays, and journals — essentially any writing task that is completed at some point during the reading process. According to Graham & Herbert (2010), writing about the reading material is effective “because it provides students with a tool for visibly and permanently recording, connecting, analyzing, personalizing, and manipulating key ideas in a text” (p. 13). Of all the writing-to-read tasks, summaries are among the most popular in many classrooms and studies. Over the years, research and studies have shown that summary writing is a strong player when it comes to improving students’ reading skills through writing-to-read tasks.

The connections that have appeared between summary writing and reading comprehension in previous studies are noted in the present study. As Noyce & Christie

(1989) claim, “a writer uses the same schemata as used for reading comprehension” (quoted in Gao, 2013, p. 43). Based on research and studies, connections can be seen between writing tasks and reading comprehension. Baleghizadeh & Babapour (2011) would agree with this, as their study used summary writing tasks to see if any effects on the level of comprehension and recall of information would be seen via a posttest. Because the group that was required to write summaries after class readings performed significantly better than the group that only discussed readings on the same posttest, summary writing did in fact have positive effects on reading comprehension and recall. The interviews with students on the writing-to-read task of summarizing done by Lin & Siriyothin (2009) resulted in positive attitudes toward the tasks presented and students felt they helped improve reading comprehension. Students also reported improvements in their usage of reading strategies. The present study will be similar to this in the sense that interviews will be conducted to see how students perceive these tasks, but the questions will focus on students’ experiences with multiple reading-to-write or writing-to-read tasks.

The present study seeks to know if students perceive effects of summary writing tasks other than effects on reading comprehension. Gao (2013) proclaims that summary writing tasks not only improve reading comprehension, but also improve reading fluency, word reading, the generating of information independently out of source texts, and the students’ overall reading ability. On the other hand, Gao has noted that not all effects of summary writing are positive. Gao also revealed that one study saw no noticeable impact on reading recall after summary tasks were completed, while another study showed that “writing has only a small, positive impact on conventional measures of academic

achievement” (2013, p. 45). From a mediation theory standpoint (which, according to Kozulin (2003), is Vygotsky’s idea that “higher-order thinking develops through mediating agents that interact with the environment”) Gao states that to explain the reason behind the positive results, reading materials and summary writing tasks fall into mediator categories and thus help students engage and learn, as well as improve reading comprehension and higher-order thinking (as cited in Gao, 2013, p.45). To explain the reason behind the negative results, Gao justifies that each learner is different and is at a different level in the learning stage; therefore, the right mediators have to be used for the context or the results will be affected. In the present study, students will be interviewed about their views on writing-to-read tasks and be able to shed more light on this area.

Research shows culture can have an effect on writing-to-read tasks. As the present study’s participants will be native and non-native speakers, people of different cultures will be interviewed. Urlaub (2011), in reference to writing-to-read tasks, declares that we need to consider culture because it plays a role, but also that “literary L2 reading skills require more than cultural literacy in the L1 and linguistic competence in the L2” (p. 98). On this idea of culture’s role, Abasi (2012) conducted a study with native-English speaking American students studying the Persian language and two texts: an authentic Iranian editorial and an American editorial translated into Persian. When the students were asked to summarize both texts (unaware one was a translation), they made statements about the differences in organization/sequence and ease of task completion, and their summaries showed differences in structure and errors. The study’s results support the idea that culture can affect the difficulty level of summarization as well as preference of text structure/rhetoric (Abasi, 2012). The present study will also explore

students' preferences when reading and writing in an L2 and add to the information presented above.

### **Bidirectional Effects on Reading and Writing Skills.**

As the present study will provide understandings of students' viewpoints on how reading and writing tasks affect their language skills, it is important to note research that has shown how these tasks affect both skills simultaneously. One example is the Graham & Hebert (2010) research on successful implementations of these tasks, noting that having lessons on writing skills and writing processes are ways an instructor can help students improve reading comprehension, reading fluency, spelling, and sentence structure. Simply incorporating tasks dealing with spelling skills can improve writing and word reading skills. Also, increasing the amount of writing in the classroom alone can help students become better writers as well as better readers (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

This current study explores both types of reading and writing tasks and students' perceptions of their effects on both reading and writing skills. A study done by Urlaub (2011) is evidence that writing-to-read tasks can affect both skills simultaneously. The L2 student participants were given creative writing samples to read before they chose a writing task paired with them. After analyzing student writings, Urlaub realized these creative writing-to-read tasks could lead to incorporating background knowledge of the genre, recognition and usage of characteristics of the original text, "recontextualization of the original into the temporal and cultural location of the learner's L1 identity" — which means that the student went beyond simply recognizing literary features on the surface structure — and it could lead to using a "complex process of rearrangements of elements from two source texts and the learner's cultural context" (2011, p. 102-103). The students

accomplished these specific feats without being told to accomplish them, or without being given direct instruction on how to do so. Seeing an improvement in writing skills was a nice addition to the study, as the main goal was actually to improve critical reading skills. Urlaub's focus was on creative writing because it "is the reconfiguration of patterns that subjects have encountered in literature" and therefore has a strong connection with critical reading (2011, p. 100). Through this study, results also showed that after completing a creative writing-to-read task based on a literary text, students became more aware of formal aspects, more aware that literary texts can have personal relevance, and could develop a comparative perspective when it comes to literary texts, all of which support that guided creative writing has a positive effect on the development of critical reading skills. In the end, it is clear that this study's original idea of writing-to-read tasks not only improved students' reading skills as hoped for, but also improved students' writing skills through the same activities. The present study will obtain more information on students' experiences and feelings about these tasks in a second language.

During the interviews of the present study, students will be asked to describe all of the effects they perceive on their language skills by writing-to-read tasks, instead of only focusing on these tasks' effects on reading skills. Some research has shown that writing-to-read tasks can affect both writing and reading skills. Sahebkhair's (2012) study uses the common writing-to-read task of summarizing, but instead of analyzing its effects on reading skills (which, as we have seen in studies noted above, has positive effects on reading comprehension), it focuses on whether or not writing skills are affected. After assigning extensive reading of specific materials to one group and summary writing based on the same readings to the other, the posttest task of writing an argumentative

paper yielded much higher scores from the summary writing group and a significant difference between the groups' performance (compared to a similar pretest that showed no significant difference between the groups). The results revealed that the summary writing group performed better than the extensive reading group in areas of grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, fluency, and form - almost two times better in most of the categories (Sahebkheir, 2012). Therefore, we can see that while writing-to-read tasks can improve reading, they also have the potential to improve writing. The present study will help add to this area of research by discovering how students perceive these tasks and how they feel their learning is affected.

Reading-to-write tasks affect not only writing skills, but also reading skills, which is why the present study includes interviews where students are asked about their perceptions of overall effects of reading-to-write tasks. Some research has revealed that reading-to-write tasks affect both writing and reading skills. Paesani (2006) performed a study that required students to read a literary excerpt and use it as a model for their writing portfolio. Paesani claims the portfolio allowed for the learning of language skills and content simultaneously, and allowed for a contextualized way of studying grammar. Students noted that their reading proficiency skills improved, that they better understood grammatical forms and why/how grammar is used in specific contexts, and that reading the literature first helped them write better via observations of the text made while reading (Paesani, 2006). Thus, the main goal of the reading-to-write tasks was not only reached because students had improved their writing skills, but was exceeded because students also improved their reading skills through the same actions.

Though the present study does not focus explicitly on examinations, it will ask students about their perceptions of combining reading and writing in a classroom setting. According to research, tests and examinations of language skills have produced positive results when the reading and writing tasks were combined. Esmaeili (2002) integrates the reading and writing tasks on an English language test so that they are thematically related and compares the results with reading and writing tasks that are thematically unrelated. The data showed that writing scores were significantly higher on the thematically related tests versus the thematically unrelated tests, and they scored higher when it came to summary recall as well. The interviews conducted after participants completed the tasks showed more than half of the participants had positive attitudes toward the thematically related condition and that they relied heavily on the reading in order to complete the writing task. The present study adds to this by reporting on interviews conducted with students on their experiences with reading and writing tasks combined in a classroom and their perceptions of them.

Chapter Two explains the methodology of the research, while Chapter Three provides the results of the interviews, discusses what the results mean, and shows how they add to our knowledge in the field of SLA.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Methodology**

#### **The Study.**

The purpose of the present study is to gather insights and information about L2 students' perceptions and experiences with reading and writing tasks. More specifically, this research focuses on reading-to-write tasks and writing-to-read tasks with an emphasis on the opinions of students and the effects of these tasks they see on their language skills. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions L2 students have in regard to reading-to-write and writing-to-read tasks?
2. What are L2 students' preferences when it comes to reading-to-write and writing-to-read tasks, and why?
3. Do the students notice any effects of these tasks on their L2 learning?

Knowing this information could change the way instructors view and implement the tasks they assign in the classroom.

#### **Context of Study.**

The present study was conducted at The University of Toledo in Ohio and the American Language Institute (ALI) located at The University of Toledo. The ALI is an Intensive English Program (IEP) affiliated with the university that prepares L2 English learners for the TOEFL exam. Once students have scored high enough on this exam, they are able to enroll in classes at the university. Students who have had experience in any of the following classes became the volunteer participants for the current study. The ALI participants have had experience in advanced-level courses. (Students must complete the

advanced-level courses prior to taking the TOEFL.) Some of the participants from The University of Toledo have had experience in a *Writing and Grammar ESL* course, which is the first course an ESL student must take if they do not get placed in the *Composition I ESL* course when they enter the university. The *Composition I ESL* course is the next level of ESL courses at the university from which volunteers were accepted. Experience in advanced-level Spanish courses at the university complete the final category of participants of this study.

### **Participants.**

L2 students were the focus of this qualitative study. Both ESL students and native English-speaking students who are learning Spanish were participants of this study. The recruitment procedure included flyers for ESL students and flyers for Spanish-learning students, as well as information sheets. The researcher visited classes at the ALI and The University of Toledo to present the study flyers and ask for volunteers. Twelve students volunteered to participate: a male and a female from the American Language Institute associated with The University of Toledo; a male and a female from a *Writing and Grammar ESL* course at The University of Toledo; a male and a female from a *Composition I ESL* course at The University of Toledo; and three males and three females with experience in advanced-level Spanish courses at The University of Toledo. These types of students were chosen because the learners of English and Spanish are at similar language skill levels. All ESL student volunteers were native Arabic speakers, and all students with advanced-Spanish experience were native English speakers. Table 1 contains more information regarding participant demographics.

Table 1: Participant Demographics.

	Total	Native Language	Age Range	Age at which one began learning L2	Experience in countries speaking L2
English-Learning Participants	6 learners (3 female and 3 male)	6 Arabic	20-27	4-13	1 had experience in English-speaking countries before USA; 5 participants have not had experience in an English-speaking country before arriving to the US
Spanish-Learning Participants	6 learners (3 female and 3 male)	6 English	20-48	6-16	5 participants had experience in Spanish-speaking countries previously; 1 has not had experience in a Spanish-speaking country, but has native Spanish-speaking family members

**Data Collection.**

The interview questions asked during this study consisted of four sections. These sections explored the L2 participants’ experiences with and perceptions of reading and writing tasks. The first set of questions asked for the student’s background information and reasons for learning the second language. The second set focused on reading-to-write tasks and writing skills. The third set was aimed at writing-to-read tasks and reading skills. The fourth set of questions asked students about their home country (or their experience abroad, if applicable) compared to the U.S. in regard to learning/teaching

reading and writing skills. This set also questioned whether or not a participant had an instructor who had mentioned the effects of combining the skills in a classroom. A complete list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

**Data Analysis.**

Responses obtained from the interviews were coded and categorized into four main sections for data analysis. Each section includes themes that arose during the interview. Table 2 contains the coding categories for the gathered data in this study.

Table 2: Coding.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reason to start/continue learning L2               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. English                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. desire</li> <li>ii. importance in business</li> <li>iii. forced/requirement</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Spanish                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. desire</li> <li>ii. importance in business</li> <li>iii. forced/requirement</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Perceptions of writing skills/reading to write               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. spelling</li> <li>b. knowledge/information</li> <li>c. more practice (writing)</li> <li>d. vocabulary</li> <li>e. rewrite what you read</li> <li>f. write in own words (plagiarism concerns)</li> <li>g. read out loud</li> <li>h. level of understanding</li> <li>i. purpose</li> <li>j. L2 in general</li> <li>k. preferences</li> <li>l. experiences</li> <li>m. structure/format</li> <li>n. go to WC, tutor, expert</li> <li>o. grammar</li> <li>p. making connections</li> <li>q. length of writing</li> <li>r. reading</li> <li>s. share own ideas</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Perceptions of reading skills/writing to read               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. spelling</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. knowledge/information</li> <li>c. more practice (reading)</li> <li>d. vocabulary</li> <li>e. rewrite what you read</li> <li>f. write in own words</li> <li>g. listen and read, read out loud</li> <li>h. level of understanding</li> <li>i. purpose</li> <li>j. L2 in general</li> <li>k. preferences</li> <li>l. experiences</li> <li>m. recall</li> <li>n. pronunciation</li> <li>o. memorizing</li> <li>p. take notes</li> <li>q. length of reading</li> <li>r. writing</li> <li>s. share own ideas</li> </ul>
<p>4. Implementation experiences, preferences, and effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. combined vs separated classes</li> <li>b. focus/what is important</li> <li>c. mentioning of benefits and effects</li> <li>d. preferences</li> </ul>

For example, if a student responded to the question asking why they began learning the L2 with, “It’s a fun language. It was easy for me and I liked watching movies and listening to English songs, so I wanted to know what they meant,” then this is coded as “1ai”, meaning that the student’s L2 is English and their reason for learning the language was based on desire. When discussing the task of reading about a topic before writing about the topic (reading to write), if a student’s answer to whether or not this affected their L2 learning was, “Yes, with vocabulary. I learned new words for ideas that I did not know existed,” it is coded as “2d” because it deals with reading-to-write tasks and vocabulary. If summary writing is being discussed and the student states, “...writing after I read helps me remember the reading and understand,” this is coded as both “3h” and “3m” to signify that comments were related to both a level of understanding and recall

for a writing-to-read task. When asked what the student noticed as the biggest difference in teaching/learning writing skills between the country they've had experience in where the L2 is spoken and the country where their native language is spoken, a response such as, "In Venezuela, it was more reading than writing, and here [in the United States] I think we write a lot. We love to write," is coded as "4b" to represent that it is related to implementation experience and what the main focus is/what is considered important.

While coding, there were two areas added to the lists that were not originally part of the categories. These labels were *2q* (length of writing), *2r* (reading), *3q* (length of reading), and *3r* (writing). In regard to *2q* and *3q*, this information was originally grouped under *2h* and *3h* (level of understanding), but as coding progressed, it became evident that these sections would be better as separate entities. As for *2r* and *3r*, this information was originally grouped in *2j* and *3j* (English in general), but it became apparent that they should be their own category; they represent examples related to thesis section *1.3 Bidirectional effects on reading and writing skills*, as they show how a reading-to-write task can not only help with writing, but also reading, while a writing-to-read task can help with reading, but also writing. Adding these sections provides a clearer view of the types of perceptions and experiences students have mentioned during the interviews.

Chapter Three discusses the results and findings of this study in regard to the perceptions and experiences of L2 learners with reading and writing tasks.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Findings and Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to gain insights on L2 students' experiences with and perceptions of different reading and writing tasks. For this reason, one-on-one interviews were conducted with L2 students (six were native Arabic speakers learning English, while six were native English speakers learning Spanish). The interviews focused on reading-to-write tasks and writing-to-read tasks. This chapter will discuss the findings discovered in this study, which include overall themes of: L2 students' experiences with reading and writing tasks; noticed effects and perceptions of the reading and writing tasks on L2 learning; and L2 students' preferences in regard to reading and writing tasks. These overall themes address the research questions asked at the beginning of the study. This chapter will also contain further sections: discussion and implications; limitations; future research suggestions; and concluding remarks.

#### **L2 Students' Experiences.**

Findings show that both the L2 Spanish learners and L2 English learners have had very similar experiences in regard to learning their L2 and the reading and writing tasks presented in the L2. Of these experiences, themes were discussed in the following categories: reasons to learn the L2; reading-to-write tasks and writing skills; writing-to-read tasks and reading skills; and implementation of the tasks in the L2 classroom.

**Reasons to learn the L2.** There are three main reasons students stated for learning the L2. Some students expressed an inner desire to learn the language, while others stated they were forced to or were required to learn the language. Some

participants noted that the role of the language in the business world led to their learning of the language, and some stated the cause was more than one of these reasons listed.

***Learning English.*** Five of the six ESL participants expressed their reason to learn English was because they were forced to learn it in school to fulfill a requirement. Of those five, four noted that they chose to continue learning English after fulfilling the school requirements because they felt English plays a strong role in the business world and would lead to more job opportunities. The sixth ESL participant expressed that they began learning English and continued learning it because they had a strong desire to, stating, “I loved English and was interested in English, so I taught myself at a young age. It’s a fun language. It was easy for me and I liked watching movies and listening to English songs, so I wanted to know what they meant.” No other reasons were discussed during the interviews.

***Learning Spanish.*** Three of the six Spanish-learning students noted a reason to start learning the language was because they were forced to, either by family members or schools they attended in order to fulfill requirements. Three of the six participants mentioned they began learning the language because they saw it as a valuable asset in the business world and in applying for job positions. All six Spanish-learning participants stated a reason for learning Spanish was because they had a desire to learn the language. While most students listed at least two of these themes as reasons, there were two students who noted all three of these reasons; one student stated, “It was essentially forced on me. [At school,] it was part of the curriculum. I made the choice to continue learning it because I knew so much and was a fan of Spanish literature and stories. I was influenced a lot by Spanish music and generally had a positive perception of Spanish

culture. And there was some employment motivations, you could say.” No other reasons were discussed during the interviews.

**Reading-to-write tasks and writing skills.** Of the twelve L2 participants in the study, six L2 Spanish learners and four L2 English learners noted they have had experience reading material about a topic and then writing about that topic; this is labeled as a reading-to-write task. When asked to elaborate on their experiences, the participants stated the assignment was a version of a research paper or research essay; they were required to read a couple different articles on a specific topic, then write about that topic and incorporate information they had found during their research. The two students who did not state they had experience with these tasks said they were not sure and could not remember.

**Writing-to-read tasks and reading skills.** Students of the study discussed three different types of experiences with writing-to-read tasks: prewriting; writing during reading; and writing after reading. Seven of the twelve participants stated they had experiences with prewriting activities, explaining that they would be given a topic and asked to write their thoughts about it, then discuss their thoughts and read an article or story about the topic. Three of these students were Spanish learners, while four of the students were English learners. Six of the participants (four L2 Spanish learners and two L2 English learners) mentioned they had experience with writing during a reading activity, whether it be annotating a text during class or stopping at a certain point of the reading to write predictions and see if they were correct.

When it came to discussing the task of writing after reading, all twelve students commented that they have had experience in this area. One student stated they had

written response essays in class, ten of the students explained they had experience writing summaries, and another student expressed that they had written both summaries and response essays in the L2. Summaries were discussed the most; comments shared by participants included, "...the summary was the most common exercise that we did," and "[writing summaries] is the majority of what we were doing." This information was not surprising; many studies conducted in this field have focused on summaries, as SLA research has shown them to be one of the most implemented tasks in a classroom. The students who did not state they had experience with some of these tasks said they were not sure and could not remember.

**Implementation of the tasks in the L2 classroom.** Each of the twelve participants stated all of their L2 courses in the US combined reading and writing in some way. Only ten of the students had experience taking classes outside of the US. Nine of them said that their L2 classes in another country also combined reading and writing, but one student stated they were taught separately. Of the last two students, one had experience abroad in the L2 country, but did not take L2 courses while there; the other did not have experience abroad.

When asked about which L2 skills are focused on most in their classes in the US, students commented that writing appears to be the most important skill enforced; reading is a close second. Some participants mentioned they have to read and write long assignments. Others stated they felt the need to worry about grammar and follow strict rules set by the instructors and/or department.

When discussing the topic of learning the L2 in a country other than the US, ten of the students could comment (as the last two had not had experience in classes abroad).

The students discussed the themes of: reading; speaking; listening; less strict/serious teachings; and length of writing/reading assignments. Some participants mentioned that reading longer sources and not doing comprehension checks during the reading was something they noticed in their L2 courses abroad. Some noted that speaking and listening skills were seen as the more important skills to learn, while reading and writing received little to no attention in their courses outside of the US. It was also noted by a few students that their instructors appeared to be less strict and less concerned with students' progress in the L2 when learning it a country other than the US.

### **Noticed Effects and Perceptions of the Tasks on L2 Learning.**

The effects of the reading and writing tasks that were felt by students have been separated into the three main sections of the interviews: reading-to-write tasks and writing skills; writing-to-read tasks and reading skills; and implementation. Then, some of the effects were further divided by: most frequently addressed themes; interesting or surprising themes; and other themes discussed.

**Reading-to-write tasks and writing skills.** A total of nineteen themes were identified during the interviews. For this section, four of the themes emerged as highly important; each drew comments by eight or more participants. Four of the themes were noted as interesting or surprising, and four of the themes were coded as other. The themes coded as *preferences* and *experiences* were excluded from this section and discussed under their appropriate sections of this chapter. The other five themes coded were only mentioned by a small amount of participants and thus are not discussed.

*Most frequently addressed themes.* During the interviews, students mentioned the benefits of reading before writing, along with the importance of vocabulary in reading-to-write tasks, quantity of reading before writing; and writing practice.

During the interviews, all twelve students mentioned they felt a benefit of reading about a topic before writing about that topic was that they would be able to obtain more knowledge and information. Because of this, some students also stated this is how reading material before writing affected their output; it led to better papers and essays. In regard to this theme, one student expressed, "...it gave me more ideas and more backgrounds of the topic, and it gave me more supportive information and resources to let the reader believe what I am saying or what I wrote." Other students communicated similar beliefs. Of all the themes discussed throughout the entire interview process, this was the only theme to be agreed upon by all.

Ten of the twelve participants noted vocabulary as a component of reading-to-write tasks. Six of the students were L2 Spanish learners, while four were L2 English learners. For example, one participant mentioned reading about the topic before writing helped them "with vocabulary. I learned new words for ideas that I did not know existed." Another student stated, "...it gave me a broader view of vocabulary, since it's not something I would normally read," pointing out that not only were the words new, but that the situations in which the words were being used were new, too. Participants expressed that reading-to-write tasks allowed them to expand their vocabulary for situations with which they were both familiar and unfamiliar.

While discussing reading-to-write tasks and writing skills, eight of the twelve students (four English learners and four Spanish learners) directly mentioned that reading

more leads to better writing in general. One student noted, "...when you read, it depend on your writing, and when you write, it depend on your reading. They are like brothers and sisters; you can't live without reading when writing and you can't live without writing when reading." Another participant stated, "...you should be reading a lot to help with your writing. You should be reading a lot of things written by [native] speakers and attempt the figurative language they are using and the prepositional phrases." A third participant explained it as, "...I see reading is connected to writing, because you can see examples of word choice, structure, and grammar. And I think it's easier to see how it is written before writing it. If you don't see how it is written, then you don't know where one word begins and ends." Different writing categories (such as vocabulary) were discussed by many students during this section, but eight of the students directly expressed that they see reading skills and writing skills as connected.

When asked about how writing skills can be improved, eight participants (four Spanish learners and four English learners) stated more practice in writing is necessary. A participant explained, "One of the biggest ways is just by writing, itself. I have tried to improve it myself by going to different writing sites that have a writing prompt each day, and I write about those prompts." Another student spoke of a diary they write in every day. One participant also noted that they like to think of their own topic and then practice writing paragraphs and essays about the topic. Half of these eight students noted only that writing more would improve writing skills, while the others spoke of other ways alongside writing more to improve writing skills (ex: reading, watching movies in the L2, etc.).

*Interesting or surprising themes.* Surprising themes brought up by students dealt with the action of writing in one's own words, using the structure/format, visiting a Writing Center or tutor, and rewriting what was read.

The theme of writing in one's own words was discussed by five of the participants. It is interesting in the way it was discussed. Four of the students noted that writing in their own words was a hard task, because many times they did not feel they had a large enough vocabulary bank or way to present the information in the L2 to do so and feared they would plagiarize. A student stated, "...the hardest part [about writing a research essay] was actually writing about it without accidental plagiarism, because there were so many facts and information." The fifth student mentioned they enjoyed writing in their own words because they felt it was easier, as they could use more simple words than the words that they read in articles. The four students who noted difficulties with this were L2 learners of Spanish, while the student who stated the opposite was an ESL learner.

The five students who noted structure and format while discussing reading-to-write tasks believed reading articles led to effects on the way they wrote about the same topics; more specifically, effects on their sentence/writing structures and paper format. One student conceded, "...you will learn more academic words, tools, and writing devices. And then, when you write them, you should be trying to utilize those elements you saw in the reading," while another student conveyed, "...it outlined a structure for my paper, as well, because I could see how they had their papers organized." After doing research on other studies in this field and finding multiple studies discussing the effects of reading on writing structure and format, I was surprised to learn less than half of the

participants in this study noted the theme, and that four of the five students were L2 Spanish learners.

Going to a Writing Center, tutor, or expert for help with the L2 was a surprising theme mentioned by three people while discussing writing skills. Two of the students were L2 Spanish learners, while one was learning English. One of the students explained, “I will create a topic from my mind, and I will write an essay or something and then I will go to the Writing Center. And also, I like to interview [native speakers] and ask them how I can improve my skills.” This was an interesting comment, as this participant was the only one to mention the use of a school Writing Center, as well as the use of native speakers in the area. Another student indicated, “...having someone who is an expert review it [is helpful] too. Or even if they aren’t an expert, just having someone give a different way to say it or phrase it.” It was surprising only three participants mentioned getting advice from someone at a higher level than their own in the L2 in order to improve their skills.

Only one participant mentioned the theme of rewriting what one has read, but the comment was an interesting point. This student was learning English as a second language. When discussing improving writing skills, the student said, “I look at a newspaper and write everything in the newspaper. For example, I will take this piece of paper home and I will get another piece of paper and write everything on this paper to improve.” The comment is interesting because, while many students reported that writing more was a way to improve the skills, this student was the only participant who mentioned writing down words *exactly* as they are written. The student felt that copying the sentences exactly would help them write it in the future on their own.

*Other themes addressed.* Students discussed the idea of sharing one's own thoughts as a positive and negative effect, along with positive effects on their L2 skills in general, the concept of grammar, and their level of understanding.

For the six participants who mentioned sharing their own ideas during the reading-to-write/writing skills section of the interview, a couple of them noted it was easy to come up with their own ideas. The other students commented that activity was the harder part of writing in the L2. One of the students summed the message up by stating, "...it is really hard to totally come up with [ideas] on your own; it is easier if you get to read about it, first." Another student noted that while it was sometimes easy to think of the ideas, it was hard to then share their thoughts in the L2 when writing. Five of these students were L2 Spanish learners, while one was an ESL learner.

Five of the twelve students (three Spanish learners and two English learners) discussed their L2 skills in general, meaning they discussed other skills being affected by the tasks besides the two skills being discussed (reading and writing). Some students simply stated they felt the reading-to-write tasks improved their overall skills in the L2. Other students were more specific in stating which skills they felt were affected (other than reading and writing). For example, one student felt that when a person reads, "...you learn how to talk fluently ...[and if] someone's having a problem and you want to know what the problem is and then you can know it." In short, this student saw reading-to-write tasks as a way to also improve speaking and listening skills.

As stated earlier, different categories of writing were discussed by students during the interviews. Grammar was a theme commented on by four of the twelve participants. One of the students explained that, "If you know vocabulary and how to use vocabulary

with the grammar, then that will improve your writing...I think grammar [is] more important than the [length of writing].” Some other students felt this way, as well. It was mentioned by others that grammar was something they could learn from reading, and that they could use what they had learned when writing. Three of these students were L2 Spanish learners, while one was an ESL learner.

When discussing the level of understanding, three students pointed out that this could either help or hinder their participation and performance. One ESL student described how they enjoyed reading comic books at first because it was at the appropriate level for them, and then slowly moved up difficulty levels. After reading them, the student noted it resulted in improving their writing skills. The other students (one Spanish learner and one English learner) stated that sometimes they feel it is hard to find easy articles to read when they are doing reading-to-write tasks, so that affects their interest in the articles and how well they do when writing. Students try to find the levels of reading material that will match their L2 level of understanding, or they realize they will not perform well and their skills will take longer to improve.

**Writing-to-read tasks and reading skills.** A total of nineteen themes were identified during the interviews. For this section, seven of the themes emerged as highly important, each containing comments by eight or more participants. Three of the themes were noted as interesting or surprising, and two of the themes were coded as other. The themes coded as *preferences* and *experiences* were excluded from this section and discussed under their appropriate sections of this chapter. The other five themes coded were only mentioned by a small amount of participants and thus are not discussed.

*Most frequently addressed themes.* Participants commented on the benefits of writing-to-read tasks, as well as how their vocabulary was affected, the effects of writing in one's own words, and how they felt their level of understanding played a role. Students also noted how their L2 skills in general were affected, and how the quantity of reading was a factor.

Ten of the twelve students alluded to knowledge and information as being one of the results of writing-to-read tasks. Six of the students were learning Spanish, while four were learning English. One student explains that writing a summary increased their knowledge of the topic and provided them with more information to write, which is similar to the comments made with the reading-to-write tasks. However, discussing summaries also brought up a new area of the knowledge/information theme, which is the idea some students have that is similar to the comment, "It was easy to summarize, because you have all of the information in front of you." Most of the ten students who mentioned knowledge/information in this section of the interviews had feelings similar to this student, stating that they took comfort in knowing the summary was only about that one reading, and that they had all the information they needed in that.

When discussing L2 vocabulary, one of the ten participants who stated this as a theme elaborated by saying, "Putting the information on the sheet [after summarizing or taking notes] improves your vocabulary and the capacity of your mind..." Another student stated that writing a summary after reading something gave them "more insight of how natives would speak and choose words. And the vocabulary alone – being able to have that in my knowledge bank helps." Five of the students who discussed this theme were L2 Spanish learners, while five were ESL learners. Vocabulary was a common

theme throughout the interviews, and through this, a lot of students showed concern for the words they choose and use in their L2.

Writing the information in your own words was a theme discussed by ten students. Six of these students were learning Spanish as an L2, while four were ESL students. Here, as with the last section, some students felt it was hard because they do not feel they have a large enough list of vocabulary words to use on their own and plagiarism can be a concern. One student elaborated on this by stating, "...it is hard not to plagiarize because my vocabulary is a lot more limited in [the L2] and if you are trying to paraphrase it...it's hard since you don't know words to replace things." There were also some students who stated they enjoyed paraphrasing and for that reason they felt it was easy to put the information into their own words. Even then, some of the students who stated that also mentioned that sometimes they do not know if the words they wrote on their own still conveyed the meaning they were supposed to convey in the original source.

Ten participants noted that their level of understanding played a role in the writing-to-read tasks and reading skills, and many of the students stated they felt writing after reading helped them understand the reading's information better. For example, a participant denoted that writing summaries "helps you with your reading comprehension, because it forces you to figure out what it says. And also, having to explain something in your own words shows that you really understood it." Another student commented, "Through the reading, I would tend to glance through information and I would not have the right influx of what the author was saying. Versus when I had to write it, it's almost as if I were the author, so I got more of a complete understanding of how the author

wrote and why the author would write the way they did.” One student also stated that if the level of the reading was too high for them, they had an even harder time writing about the information in a summary because they were not able to understand the content. Five ESL students and five L2 Spanish students mentioned the level of understanding during the discussion of writing-to-read tasks.

There were eight participants who explained that when they write about what they have read in general, they become better readers in the process. Five of the students who mentioned this were learning Spanish, while three were learning English. Some mentioned that they view reading and writing as skills that help each other, and that when they write about a text, it shows they were better able to read the text. A couple students also noted that they felt writing after reading helped them improve their reading skills so they could move up a level in the L2. Eight of the students stated they have observed writing skills and reading skills as connected, but they were not all of the same students who saw this connection in the reading-to-write/writing skills section.

Eight of the twelve students (five ESL learners and three Spanish learners) discussed their L2 skills being affected in general (other than only reading and writing skills). One student stated that writing-to-read tasks could help your mind be a “sponge with all language skills.” Some other students were more specific in stating the other skills, as one student commented, “Overall, [writing about what I have read] has made me a better speaker of [the L2]”. This shows that some students also believe that writing-to-read tasks and reading skills can help to improve speaking skills in the L2.

When asked about how reading skills can be improved, one of the eight students (four English learners and four Spanish learners) who noted more practice as a theme

explained that reading more books that are at a level of the L2 just above where the reader is can improve reading skills. Another student said, "...just explore books and read more articles because it will help improve [reading skills]." Again, half of the eight students stated that reading more only would improve reading skills, while the others spoke of other ways alongside reading more to improve reading skills (ex: writing, speaking, etc.).

*Interesting or surprising themes.* Participants mentioned some interesting points regarding how writing-to-read tasks can affect information recall. Some students also expressed that they felt listening and reading/reading out loud were factors, while pronunciation was another effect.

Recall, alluded to by seven of the twelve participants, included the idea that once the students wrote about what they had read, they were able to remember the information better and felt it reinforced the ideas in their minds. A participant explained their beliefs by stating, "I do not remember it at all unless I write something about it...writing after I read helps me remember." The other six students explained several thoughts of the same kind, noting that writing has a positive effect on the students' ability to recall the information at a later time. Five of the students who discussed recall as a theme were L2 Spanish learners, while two were ESL learners.

The theme of listening and reading/reading out loud and the theme of pronunciation revealed themselves as interesting cases. Four students commented on how these tasks improve their pronunciation, and three of those four students stated that the listening and reading and/or reading out loud were part of the reason for the improvement in pronunciation. The three students who mentioned the ideas of listening and

reading/reading out loud expressed feelings along the lines of the following statement, “I listen to songs with the lyrics. It helps because I can listen to how the word is actually pronounced and can read it at the same time, and it helps me read faster and understand faster.” One of these students also explained that they did not have to listen to the words being said every time, but that simply reading things out loud helped better their reading skills and pronunciation. The third mentioned a combination of listening and reading, as well as reading out loud as activities that helped improve reading skills and pronunciation. The fourth student, who only noted the theme of pronunciation, stated that they felt the tasks in general helped improve their pronunciation of certain words. All of these students were ESL learners.

***Other themes addressed.*** Students expressed that taking notes and sharing their own ideas played roles in writing-to-read tasks.

Of the four students who commented on taking notes, an ESL learner and L2 Spanish learner stated they had to do so in class as an assignment, one Spanish learner stated they choose to do this on their own, and one ESL learner explained they had to take notes in class as assigned by the instructor and also took notes at home with reading homework. The students expressed that these were writing-to-read tasks, in that they would have to stop as a class (or individually) to take notes periodically through a reading. The participants felt that taking notes led to a better understanding of the reading.

Four students (two English learners and two Spanish learners) mentioned the theme of sharing their own ideas during the writing-to-read/reading skills section. One student explained that they enjoy writing-to-read tasks when they are able to share their

own ideas, such as during a response essay. Another student stated they struggled with writing summaries. They described that this is because “it is hard to avoid examples...you are used to writing sentences with a thesis statement and then you improve it with examples, because they are evidence for what you write about.” The student then expressed that the problem is that summaries are not supposed to have a lot of details or any of your own thoughts in them, so it contradicts what the student has previously learned, and therefore leads to the student struggling.

**Implementation of the tasks in the L2 classroom.** At the end of the interview, students were asked if they had ever had an instructor mention the benefits of combining reading and writing and the effects the skills have on each other. All twelve students stated that they have had at least one instructor mention this during class or on the syllabus for the course.

Students were then asked to comment on whether or not the mentioning of the benefits had an affect on how they view L2 reading and writing. Ten of the students stated that it positively affected how they view the skills, and how they view learning the skills. It was stated by multiple participants that hearing about the connections between the skills from the instructor helped them see the connections in their own work, and helped them have a better appreciation of reading-to-write tasks and writing-to-read tasks (even if they did not always enjoy the tasks). The final two students (Spanish learners) stated that the mentioning of the benefits and connections did not change their views of the skills or tasks. One stated that they did not like reading in the L2, so even though they knew it had benefits both on their reading and writing skills, it did not change how they felt about reading itself. The other student explained that they always saw a connection

between the skills since they began learning the L2, and for that reason, the mentioning of the benefits did not change their views.

### **L2 Students' Preferences.**

For each section, the participants of this study were provided with two options they could choose from. Once they chose an option, they were asked to explain why they preferred one over the other.

**Reading-to-write tasks and writing skills.** The options presented in this section were whether they would prefer to (A) be given a topic and then begin writing about it immediately, or (B) be given a topic, read about the topic, and then write about the topic.

Of the twelve students, ten expressed they would prefer option (B). Explanations alluded to the themes previously discussed, mentioning that reading about the topic first would lead to obtaining more information, better vocabulary words to choose from, and more techniques to use with structure and format. One of the two students who preferred option (A) stated it was because they dislike reading, and for that reason would rather only write about the topic. The other student expressed that they preferred free writing instead of reading someone else's ideas before writing, and therefore would like to be given a topic and the freedom to write on their own.

**Writing-to-read tasks and reading skills.** The options presented in this section were whether they would prefer to (A) be given something to read and then be tested over the information, or (B) be given something to read, write about it, and then be tested over the information.

The participants were divided evenly in regard to this preference. Six of the students expressed they would choose option (B), and used similar themes stated above

as their reasons. For example, these students believed writing about the information they read would allow them to better understand the information, as well as remember the information for the test. On the other hand, six of the participants chose option (A) and provided reasons such as disliking paraphrasing or writing in general. Some of these students also said they felt it would take more time if they had to write about the information, so they preferred to read the information multiple times on their own and then be tested over it immediately. Though the twelve participants were divided evenly by number for these preferences, they were uniquely divided by L2 learner, as well. Five of the six students preferring (B) were Spanish learners, while five of the six students supporting (A) were English learners.

An interesting comment that was identified in this section was presented by two participants; one participant chose option (A), and the other chose option (B). Both stated that a concern of theirs was that, if they wrote after they read, they could get confused between the information they read and the information they wrote when taking the test. They also stated they would not be sure if the information they wrote about the reading was correct in meaning, and therefore also could lead to a poor test result. The participant who chose (A) used these reasons as their excuse for not wanting to write at all. However, the participant who chose (B) stated these reasons, but then stated that they would still prefer to write before taking the test, as they believed it would still be more beneficial to remember the main idea.

**Implementation of the tasks in the L2 classroom.** For this section, students were asked whether they would prefer to have reading and writing classes combined or would prefer to have them taught as completely separate courses. Nine of the twelve

participants mentioned they would prefer having reading and writing taught in the same class. Their reasons matched those stated above, being that they observed benefits of reading on their writing skills and benefits of writing on their reading skills. One student also mentioned that since they did not enjoy reading, they preferred to have the classes combined in order to avoid only reading.

Three of the students stated that, even though they had previously mentioned they observed positive effects from having the skills combined, they would prefer to have the skills taught separately. Two of the students felt it would allow them to focus more on one skill at a time, and therefore allow them to improve those skills at a steadier pace. The other student stated that they strongly disliked writing, and for that reason would like to be able to choose a reading course without having to write during that course. All three of these students were ESL learners.

### **Discussion and Implications.**

Throughout this study, most of the themes mentioned were divided fairly equally between the L2 English and L2 Spanish learners. However, there were some areas in both the perceptions section and preferences section that displayed differences between ESL and L2 Spanish participants. The themes in which this was mentioned in the reading-to-write tasks/writing skills (perceptions) section were: write in your own words; structure/format; and sharing one's own ideas. For each of these themes, only one ESL learner was counted, while the rest of the participants were L2 Spanish learners (the first two themes were 1:4, while the third theme was 1:5). This shows that most ESL students were either unaware of the effects on/roles of these themes during these tasks, or that they did not feel they were important enough themes to discuss. It is possible that five of the

ESL students did not comment on the themes of writing in one's own words, text structure and format, or sharing their own ideas because only four of the six expressed they had experience with reading-to-write tasks. On the other hand, all six Spanish learners mentioned they have had experience with reading-to-write tasks. Also, two ESL participants noted they do not like reading, so this may have had an affect on the effects they perceived of reading on their writing skills.

In the writing-to-read tasks/reading skills (perceptions) section, the theme of recall showed that five L2 Spanish learners saw this as a theme significant enough to note, while only two ESL learners felt this way. It is possible that more ESL students (and the one Spanish-learning student) were unaware versus aware of the effects on recall. It is also possible that the ESL students did not know how to express this theme in English, and therefore did not mention recall/reinforcement during their interview. As for the themes of listening and reading/reading out loud and pronunciation, only ESL students commented. This could indicate that this is a strategy enforced more in other countries than in the United States, especially since listening and speaking were mentioned as skills more focused on in the other countries.

As stated earlier when discussing preferences regarding writing-to-read tasks/reading skills, five of the six students preferring to read and then write before being tested over the information were Spanish learners. This could be because, even though some students noted concerns regarding writing in one's own words, these students stated they believed writing about what they read would help them remember the overall point and information better. On the other hand, five of the six students supporting only reading and then being tested over the information were English learners. This seems to be due to

being worried about confusing one's own words (if they were to choose to write) with the information in the reading and then performing poorly on the test. It also could be related to the comment stating that, in their home countries, these students would normally receive a paragraph from their teacher, memorize that paragraph exactly, and then be tested over the paragraph. If the students are used to memorizing the information exactly as it was originally written, it is possible they would feel more comfortable repeating the same action instead of adding the writing step before being tested.

The discussion regarding the implementation of the tasks in the L2 classroom located in the preferences section noted that only three students preferred to have the skills of reading and writing taught as separate classes, and all three of these students were ESL learners. As explained before, two of these students noted the reason of being able to focus more, while one stated they simply did not like one of the skills, therefore they would like them separate in order to have a "break" from one when learning the other. These feelings of ESL learners could be due to the fact that they are currently studying in their L2's country. Being completely surrounded by the L2 could cause students to feel overwhelmed, so they may view focusing on one skill at a time in class more desirable. As for the L2 Spanish learners, even though many had experience learning the L2 abroad, most of their experiences have been learning Spanish in the United States. It is possible that they did not prefer the skills taught in separate classes because class is the main setting where they are learning the language, so they may not feel as overwhelmed.

Overall, the information obtained from the students during the interviews of this study shows that while every student noticed at least one positive effect of reading on

their writing skills and writing on their reading skills, it did not always lead to the respective options when preferences were discussed, neither did it always lead to the consideration of using one skill to specifically improve the other. For example, some participants said completing a reading-to-write task did improve their writing, but when asked how they improve their writing skills, reading was not always mentioned. Some students noted they observed positive effects of the writing-to-read tasks on their reading skills, comprehension, and recall, but when asked their preferences, half of the students stated they would rather skip the reading and just write. Only one student out of the twelve participants stated they would prefer the skills taught as completely separate classes, even though the comments made by the student previously during the interview supported that they saw the effects of having the skills combined. All of these results would lead us to believe it really depends on the student when it comes to implementing reading and writing tasks. Even though a student sees the positive effects of a certain task, sometimes other values can cause the student to prefer the opposite. Instructors of second language classrooms should be aware of the different perceptions students have and the possible effects of reading and writing tasks, but should also keep in mind that each class is going to respond differently, as each student has their own opinions and values.

### **Limitations.**

Language played a role in this study as a possible limitation because the interviews were directed in English. For the students learning English as a second language, it is possible they did not answer the questions as fully as they would have if

the language of the interview had been their native language. This also could have led to some misunderstandings when questions were asked.

As the interviewer, I sometimes felt the Hawthorne effect<sup>1</sup> was apparent during two of the interviews. While interviewing the students, there were a couple answers that seemed to be stated because they felt the answers were the “correct” answers. For example, if a student was asked if they believed certain tasks affected their learning of the L2, they may answer, “Yes, of course,” but then not be able to provide a reflective statement explaining how the tasks affected their learning. These two students were also ESL participants, so again, the language of the interviews could have an effect on this, as well.

During one interview with a native English speaker, when discussing their views of reading and writing near the end of the interview, the student said, “Now that you are actually asking me the questions about it, I do see that when you read something, you are helping your writing, and when you write something, you are helping your reading and vocabulary, instead of just having them separate.” In this case, the student points out that they previously did not think about how the skills were connected, but through the interview, the student reflected more on their connections, and through that, some beliefs were changed or strengthened.

### **Future Research.**

To further the research gathered in this study, a future study could explore the experiences, perceptions, and preferences of instructors of an L2. Instructors of L2s could be interviewed about their own experiences with implementing the reading-to-write and

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<sup>1</sup> The Hawthorne effect describes a situation in which participants choose to respond in certain ways because they are aware that they are being observed.

writing-to-read tasks and the effects they have noticed on their students' progress. They could be asked about their own preferences when choosing which tasks to implement and why. Having the knowledge of experiences, perceptions, and preferences of students and instructors of a second language in regard to reading and writing tasks and skills would further this field of SLA.

**Conclusion.**

This study aimed to reveal L2 students' experiences, perceptions (of effects), and preferences in regard to reading and writing tasks and their implementation in the L2 classroom. The findings showed that most students shared similar experiences and perceptions of the tasks, as well as experiences with how the tasks were implemented in their courses. The information provided by this study has further expanded the research in the area of L2 reading and writing, and can offer knowledge to instructors of L2 reading and writing on student insights.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What country are you from?
3. What is/are your native language(s)?
4. How long have you been in the U.S.?
5. How long have you been at UT, including the ALI?
6. Have you taken the advanced class at the ALI, ENGL 1020, and/or ENGL 1110 (or in Spanish)? When?
7. Have you visited or lived in any other countries? Which countries and for how long?
8. How old were you when you first started learning English (Spanish)?
9. What was your reason to begin learning English (Spanish)?
10. What do you feel is the most effective way to better your writing skills? Why?
11. Have you ever been asked to read about a topic before writing about that topic? Such as reading articles before writing a paper, etc.
12. What was the assignment? What did you have to do?
13. What did you read about?
14. What did you write about?
15. Tell me about doing the assignment.
16. What was easy about the assignment? What was hard?
17. Did reading about the topic first affect how you wrote about your topic? If so, in what ways?
18. Do you feel this affected your learning? If so, how?

19. Would you prefer to be given a topic and (A) begin writing about it immediately or (B) read about the topic and then write? Why?
20. What do you feel is the most effective way to better your reading skills? Why?
21. Have you ever been asked to write before a reading activity? Such as doing a pre-writing activity to think about the topic before reading about it, etc.
22. Have you ever been asked to write during a reading activity? Such as stopping halfway through reading to write what you think might happen next in the story, etc.
23. Have you ever been asked to write after a reading activity? Such as writing a summary of something you read, etc.
24. What was the assignment? What did you have to do?
25. Tell me about doing the assignment.
26. What did you read?
27. What was easy about the assignment? What was more difficult?
28. Did writing about what you read affect how you understood the reading? If so, in what ways?
29. Do you feel this affected your learning? If so, how?
30. Would you prefer to (A) be given something to read and then be tested over the information or (B) be given something to read, write about the reading, and then be tested over the information? Why?
31. In your home country (or the country in which you studied abroad), have you had classes that have combined reading and writing, or only classes that have taught the skills separately?

32. In the U.S., have you had classes that have combined reading and writing, or only classes that have taught the skills separately?
33. Do you enjoy when reading and writing are combined in a classroom or would you rather have them as separate classes? Why?
34. What do you think is the biggest difference between your home country (or the country in which you studied abroad), and the U.S. when it comes to teaching/learning writing skills?
35. What do you think is the biggest difference between your home country (or the country in which you studied abroad), and the U.S. when it comes to teaching/learning reading skills?
36. Have you ever had a teacher who mentioned or discussed the benefits of reading and writing together? If so...
- a) Was it in your first language or second language?
  - b) What was mentioned/discussed?
  - c) Did the mentioning of the benefits affect your reading/writing skills? If so, how?
  - d) Did the mentioning of the benefits affect the way you view reading and writing? If so, how?