

The Academic Dilemma on the Use of Proof Readers in Academic Assignments

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Received: January 25, 2022

Accepted: April 6, 2022

Online Published: April 21, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v12n4p16

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n4p16>

Abstract

It is a well-known idea that Non-Native English Speakers (NNES) often try to find ways to assist writing. Perhaps, the most common assistance would be feedback from their supervisors or support from their peers. However, certain students with means, would go the extra mile of employing proofreaders to help improve their writing. This study is part of a longitudinal narrative study involving five international postgraduate students in a UK university where the theme of proofreader and/or proofreading had become an academic dilemma on whether it should be permitted at all. The findings showed both positive and negative assumptions from the participants. A participant who scored well with the help of proofreaders learnt the university's writing conventions from her 'mistakes'. Another participant who was academically weaker however, expected her writing to be 'translated' into the university's writing conventions along with grade improvements. Other participants deemed such gesture as immoral and blamed the university for not banning such services, putting less financially able students at a 'disadvantage'.

Keywords: academic writing, nnes, proofreading, narrative study, international students, postgraduates

1. Introduction

Academic writing is synonymous with higher education. In the United Kingdom (UK), there is a steady increase of international students' population studying in higher education with 458,520 in 2017/2018 that had risen to 485, 645 in 2018/2019 (Study in UK, 2021). With a possible conjectured surge in years to come, universities would be faced with more Non-Native English Speakers (NNES) or Second Language (L2) writers. However, academic writing is often perceived as more problematic for these NNES as they might encounter difficulty grasping the necessary academic skills (Martirosyan, Hwang & Wanjohi, 2015) apart from experiencing academic culture shock and academic transition that could contribute to an international students' academic performance (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010).

With the steady increase of international students worldwide since year 2000 (Anderson, 2015), so has the research focus of their use of proof readers and topics of debate surrounding it (Harwood, Austin & Macaulay, 2009; Corcoran, Gagne & McIntosh, 2018). Although there's a tendency for international students to seek feedback from tutors, as it is seen the most effective method of support (Malik, 2000), it may seem insufficient. Sadler (1989) urged students not just to become consumers of feedback but insiders instead, tutors would need to provide students with "authentic evaluation experience" (p.135) and learners need to possess an ample amount of tacit knowledge to properly deduce statements given in feedback. However, in order to become a skilled writer, a learner needs a long-term development path with explicit guidelines (Ryshina-Pankova & Byrnes, 2013) and feedback is a useful avenue yet it may not be enough.

Due to such pressure to become academically competent, ESL and EFL have a tendency to go to writing support centres, to seek for proof reading help (Kim, 2018). Although universities strove to increase awareness on ethical proof reading with university recommended proof readers, not all proof reading sought by students are from university's recommended list. Some students could solicit family, friends or freelance proof readers that had no ties to the university hence might or might not be aware with the ethical guidelines set by the institutions (Harwood et al, 2009).

This study attempts to explore the participants' perception on the use of proof reading services on academic

assignments and the possible reasons that instigated them to partake in or dissuade them from such activities. It is not the intention of this study to demonstrate commonness nor disagreement among participants but rather show the complexity of narrative studies where perceptions were intricately unique and intertwined with their identity and also perhaps, personality. This study also sought to detail other helpful avenues of support for academic assignments as perceived by the participants. As various definitions have been attached to the word 'proof reading' this study will use Harwood et al.'s (2009, p.166) definition that proof reading is "third party interventions (entailing written alteration) on assessed work in progress".

2. Study Context

The study was conducted in a university in the UK, southwest of London. Like most universities in the UK, the university has its own academic support centre, with special allocation for undergraduates and postgraduates. The institution also provided a language centre that is especially catered for international students who are less proficient in the English language that could affect their academic writing or even learning comprehension.

This study specifically focused on international postgraduate students studying at the university in a MSc programme. As this is a longitudinal study, I followed the participants for more than 10 months. During this period, the participants were assigned to four modules, each with a writing component that made up the bulk of their passing grade at 60%. Each module was interrelated to one another in preparation for their thesis write up towards the end of their academic year. Each of the participants were assigned a supervisor per module with some university support such as a pastoral tutor, peer tutor and some were even admitted to an academic writing support staff to help them with their assignments.

3. Literature Review

Proof reading is not a new phenomenon and is becoming more and more widely available. Starting at undergraduate level, NNES students were already expected to become proficient writers and often those who write using complex sentences and coherent texts could construct and compose their texts more successfully as they were more inclined to employ an array of writing strategies (Munoz-Luna, 2015).

Some such strategies for NNES apart from tutor's feedback are to go to a writing support centre and employ a proof reader. Writing support centres provide one on one personalised tutorials and help students with writing struggles. Govender and Alcock (2020) conjectured that together with tutor's support, these writing centres could positively contribute towards students' academic progress and development, especially in higher education. Nevertheless, there has been instances where tutees mistake these writing centres as providing proof reading services (Alowayid, 2020; Kim 2018) causing mismatch in expectations between the tutors and the tutees.

However, not all students opt for writing support centres provided by the university. A number of students turn to proof reading services where there's no concrete ethical guideline in place for those seeking proof reading services outside university approved lists and this occurs more likely in the international students than domestic students (Conrad, 2019). According to the Institute of Professional Editors Limited (2017), proof reading is regarded as part of a three-stage process led by the copyediting stage that includes grammar, spelling and coherence, and earlier editing, where editors are involved and advises writing improvement for writers. Matarese (2016) refers to proof reader as a form of quality check after an initial edit, however in an academic sense, students who approach writing support centres for proofreading might see it differently. While ethically, one would see proof reading in academic context as a clarifying task, language and style editing to suit the institution's conventions, there still exists students' or tutors' inclination for a more substantial edit that requires content and even structural changes (Editors Canada, n.d.). In academic language and learning (ALL), proof reading is regarded as altering a students' text or at least directing them where the alteration is needed (McNally & Kooyman, 2017). In McNally and Kooyman's (2017), they mentioned that there is a national-wide consensus of universities stating 'no proof reading' services for their students, yet academic advisors are still asked for such service and some will succumb to such request due to various reasons and this deemed as inappropriate (Chromik, 2002). Due to inconsistencies with the mere definition could cause confusion not only among academics but the proof readers themselves. This hence called for a more explicit notion that proof reading being offered is part of a pedagogical assistance and supported by the institution with clear guidelines.

The notion above is agreed by Harwood (2019) who stated the significance for standardized and unambiguous proof-reading regulation and called for a more formative type of proof reading in order to enhance academic literacy. This call for action was due to his study in 20-19, where Harwood found inconsistencies in the way the nine proof readers execute their task of the same badly written L2 master's thesis. The proof readers faced the dilemma on what

constitutes ethical proofreading and some pushed the fine line between proof reading and intervention that could be regarded as unethical.

As Harwood is a well-known scholar in the area of proof-reading, much of his studies were based on proof readers themselves and did not focus on the students and their view of proof reading. International students bring in revenue to the universities with the higher fees they are being charged yet the universities themselves 'created' the problem of the need for proofreading themselves by weakening the admission standards and accepting students whose writing skills have not yet met the university's benchmarks (Lines, 2016). Hence it is only logical that such universities do not penalize students who could not achieve their standards (Corcoran et al., 2018).

This is not to say that all international student uses proof reading services due to negligence, but rather to meet the writing standards of the institution. In a study by Alkhatib (2019) involving 18 postgraduate interviews and 147 survey respondents that involved both native and non-native students in the UK. Her study showed justification of reasons for employing a proof reader to achieve a grammar free writing and in turn, obtain a high grade. As professional proof reading is rather expensive, some turned to friends and families to help them with their writing difficulty.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on proof reading and proof readers most of the array of literature either focus on proof reading ethics or offers generalized ideas. This study attempts to go in-depth and connect authentic factors as experienced by postgraduates at a UK university in building their perception related to their academic writing struggle and views on the use of proof readers.

4. Methodology

This paper is part of a longitudinal study with five international postgraduate students as participants using narrative inquiry. These participants signed up for the study voluntarily after I first made my pitch at one of their sessions with no incentive promised, apart from the possibility for a metacognitive self-reflection experience and perhaps better comprehension of their academic writing. The participants are postgraduate international students of the same cohort of twenty students and were all enrolled in an MSc programme designed as part of a 1+3 programme and to be upgraded as PhD candidates if the overall score requirements are met.

The methods used were blog entries and interviews. Over the span of more than ten months (two semesters), the participants were assigned with four modules that often cumulated with one major academic writing assignment for each module. Prior to the start of the semester, I have briefed the participants to blog at least thrice per assignment received and more than this was a bonus for me. The participants were instructed to blog once before or while conducting their writing assignments, once after they have submitted their assignments and last, immediately after they received their marks and feedback. The rationale for such intervals was so that the study would not become too intrusive. The first blog aimed to see how the students first see themselves conducting the assignment, the second blog to learn their perception after they have completed the assignment and the last blog was to capture their raw emotional feeling upon receiving their grade and feedback.

The blog entries were followed up by two interviews for each module. Once usually administered during the ongoing assignment and the second one a day or two after receiving their feedback. These interviews were essential to elucidate certain issues they may have raised in their blog entries as well as an avenue to further elaborate their feelings that they might had difficulty expressing via blog entries. Furthermore, the absence of non-verbal gestures, body language and speech intonation also had an impact on the data.

The data were thematically analysed using NVivo where the participants' themes and concerns was mapped. The data analysis was conducted in intervals (in between blogs and interviews). Each recurring and common themes between participants were then further brought up and explored in the next interview and the cycle continued until the last interview. This study does not attempt to be generalizable but rather seek for in-depth perspectives of the participants.

5. Findings

For coherence and cohesion reading purpose, the table below shows some selected information about the participants which is correct during the time of data collection. This chapter is written in a descriptive but analytical manner to showcase its narrative depth and nature.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Participant	Gender	Age	IELTS Band Score
Edith	Female	28-35	8
Cindy	Female	30	5.5
Ava	Female	29	7
Adam	Male	24	7.5
Julia	Female	35	Undisclosed

The findings that follow exhibits the occurring themes relating to the notion of proof reading. Concisely, participants believed that their/their peers' initiation on using proof reading services were related to their English language competency and saw proof reading as a form of academic support apart from the usual tutors' and peers' feedback as well as provision of writing samples.

5.1 The Importance on Mastery of English

As English is known as a global lingua franca and where most academic articles and researches are written in English (Ventayen & Orlanda-Ventayen, 2018), there's an unspoken pressure to be able to write well in English. Having international students as participants for this study, perhaps one of the common themes was related to their mastery of the English language that led to three of them to seek proof reading services. All the participants with an exception for Cindy were proficient in English. Cindy believed her limited academic writing skills and vocabulary knowledge hindered her ability to write well. Often during the interviews, would she bring up her NNES identity and relate it to her academic performance. Other participants would also comment regarding their NNES identity and whether this affects their writing ability.

Cindy often seemed to hold back when speaking about certain issues. However, Cindy was passionate when discussing the importance of the English language relating it to her less than proficient communicative and academic ability. She believed this caused her difficulty following her modules, conversations apart from writing ineffectively. Being incompetent in the English language according to Cindy could affect academic thinking, judgment as well as the rhetoric of writing.

Adam and Ava also believed that proficiency and competency in the English language was imperative to postgraduates like themselves. Adam recapitulated that postgraduate studies often require students to be able to communicate their ideas critically and efficiently and believed that "everything is interrelated". from writing to reading to speaking and that one cannot be fully competent without the other. Ava added that academic writing at postgraduate level required them to write succinctly and emphasized the importance of knowledge of the English language itself including but not limited to grammar, academic vocabulary and linguistic features that could make up the writing convention of the university one is attending.

Apart from Cindy, the rest of the participants understood that mastering the language was irrelevant to their identity as Non-native speakers of English (NNES). Cindy felt her NNES identity impeded her learning the language and often related it back to her academic upbringing where exposure to the language was limited. The rest of the participants however disagreed with such notion, having experienced native speakers struggle with academic writing.

5.2 Participants' Perception on the Use of Proof Readers

Throughout the data analysis period, the theme of proof reading seemed to constantly appear in each of the participants' interview, although some appeared much later than others. The theme on proof readers was heavily discussed by Cindy, Julia and Ava as they appeared to be quite dependent on them. They all believed that having someone proofread their assignments was a favourable gesture as proof readers can give them certain benefits that could be lacking from their tutors' or peers' feedback.

Julia advocated that she need not worry about grammar nor sentence structure because "*my proof reader's taken care of that*" and allowed her to focus on her content instead. She added that using proof readers for all her assignments had helped her keep track of her academic writing development as she saw improvements as she progressed through each assignments. It needs to be noted that Julia's idea of 'improvement' was not in terms of marks she received but the kind of feedback and comments that had acquired from her tutors.

Ava was also adamant that a proof reader is "*a must*" for international students studying in the UK. She reasoned that this proof readers functions as someone who can assess her academic writing clarity. Ava claimed that she only found out that she was struggling with connecting ideas and this notion was revealed by her proof reader that Ava

had the tendency to reveal her ideas quite late into her paragraphs. This act, according to Ava could help her resonate writing for the native speakers. With achieving better marks and grades after using proof reading services, Ava was determined to continue using such services as she saw the benefit to outweigh the financial drawback.

Cindy was also an avid user of proof reading services. During my interviews with her, I could see that she was not as competent in the English language compared to the other four participants. Cindy, at times, had to use Google translate to convey her meanings hence, it is understood why she felt she needed a proof reader to look at her academic writing. However, she did not seem to rake in the same benefits like Julia and Ava. Although she perceived proof readers to ease her “*grammatical burden*” and enabled her to focus on content and the criticality of her arguments, Cindy was still receiving comments about her writing from her tutors and scored below 60 marks for two of her assignments.

For Adam and Edith, neither felt the need for a proof reader. Adam said it “*never crossed my mind*” and that he would not have the time nor patience to send his assignment to a proof reader. Edith on the other hand perceived that she had no need for proof readers because her assignment feedback and comments were never related to her writing skills, receiving compliments such as “*you write well*”, “*well-organized*” and “*well-written*”. Despite such comments, each of Edith’s marks were the same, unlike Ava’s that thrived towards two distinctions for her last two assignments.

Ava, Julia and Cindy did not select their proof readers casually but have certain characteristics that needed to be met. These are reasonable demands given the amount they had to spend on this academic transaction. Ava specifically chose a British proof reader as she aimed to adhere to the British academic writing conventions, as she was rather used to the American way that two of her tutors had commented her awkward use of American slang in her writing. Julia, on the other hand required her proof reader to have a PhD minimum as this was the writing standard that she aimed to match. Cindy had a more inconvenient experience that she had to change her proof readers twice, which meant she had three proof readers to work with for her four assignments. She said the first was a British lady that did not understand her writing so she opted for a Turkish proof reader whom she felt would share the same cultural roots and would understand her better. However, Cindy said her second proof reader still failed to deliver what she wanted and she finally settled with her British-French proof reader until the end. The participants’ selection of proof readers showed an interesting and contrasting stipulation as what a proof reader should possess in the eyes of postgraduate students.

Back and forth during each interview, there were increasing uncomfortable chatter and passing comments by the participants on the ethics of proof readers and the services they provided. Julia, Ava and Cindy were adamant that their proof readers were ethical, providing them with writing corrections and grammar but never touched on their contents. The participants however shared that some of their other colleagues were not as academically ethical and shared that their proof readers would do more than just correcting their grammar. Even though the participants could not provide me with hard evidence, the participants shared with me an array of proof reading services on the internet that were coaxing desperate students to have their assignments written by so-called professionals with full confidentiality. Some participants also reported knowledge of unethical proof readers who were willing to accept extra payments if they agreed to re-write and re-structure certain elements of the essay or the whole paper. This caused the participants to feel uneasy, particularly by Edith who saw this as a trait of unfairness among the less financially able yet academically ethical. Edith blamed the university for not tackling this matter with more transparency, leaving students to wonder the fine line between what is considered acceptable versus unacceptable, ethical versus non-ethical, and academic help versus academic exploitation. All of the participants expressed comments of curiosity whether the university were aware of such activities and if they were, did they turn a blind eye as the university’s income were to some extent garnered by fee-paying international students.

5.3 Other Source of Support

Feedback from tutors were the primary preference of support mentioned by the participants. No sense of ‘spoon-feeding’ was presented in the data although the participants saw their tutors as a source of motivation and academic guide. All the participants understood that their tutors can only support so much, and more often than not, would only advise on content and never on the linguistic aspects nor writing conventions. The participants who had a positive relationship with their tutors such as Ava and Adam, benefitted from the feedback and understood how they can improve in the future. Cindy, Julia and Yseen however, had a less than positive experience regarding their relationship with their tutors, that could have perhaps stunted their academic writing development. With so much at stake and 60% passing mark to be achieved, this prompted some students including the some of the participants to turn to proof reading services.

Apart from tutors and proof readers, the participants also mentioned other avenues for writing support. One of such avenues was in form of peer feedback and peer support which Adam speak eagerly of. He only participated once for the first assignment as time constraint was a denying factor for him to do more. Regardless, Adam spoke highly of this experience, dubbing peer feedback as “*valuable*”. Ava had the same experience as Adam where she had one of her assignments looked at by a peer for feedback. She expressed the same high praise regarding the benefits of such activity before changing her preference for proof readers.

The positive reaction towards peer feedback nor peer support was not unanimous. Edith, Julia and Cindy all had their doubts. Edith did not participate in peer feedback because she distrusts her peers and believe that they could poach her ideas. Perhaps this was because of Edith’s pessimistic views of her peers, labelling them as brown-nosers towards their tutors and “*unethical*”. Julia who initially spoke positively about peer feedback benefits changed her tune when she received unconstructive feedback in one of her online sessions with her peers.

Perhaps, the most compelling response about peer feedback was Cindy. Cindy sought for peer feedback and understood its productive values. Cindy tried to make blamed her incompetence in the English language as the root cause of this inferring her peers feared to work with her due to her communicative difficulties as miscommunication had occurred in the classroom because of it.

Another source of support insisted by the participants was for the university to provide them with more support for international students. Although there was a writing support centre at the university, the participants felt that it was implicitly for international students who did not obtain IELTS band of 6.5 and above thus only selective students were informed about it such as Cindy. Cindy believed that linguistically incompetent students like her should be given longer one on one meeting than the usual half an hour.

Besides the writing support centre, all the participants believe that the university support made available did not support their academic transition phase but was rather motivated towards the final production – summative assignment and they considered this as inadequate. Ava reported reluctance of some tutors to support struggling international students beyond the classroom. When the cohort went to the MSc director to express their distress, it was acknowledged but no real action was taken. It was only until one of the tutors learn about their trouble that she arranged for an extra session to help solve the problem. Julia also ridiculed the university’s attempt at helping students with academic writing by giving them one hour session as “*not enough*”. Julia was reluctant to go to her personal tutor as she did not want to appear “*dependent*” or “*annoying*” hence, a collective session was preferred.

Lastly, sample essays were regarded by all participants except for Edith as another source of useful writing support. They all believed that writing samples could provide them with guidelines on academic writing conventions and expectations in the programme and the university. Adam stated that sample writings could provide students with more “concrete rather than abstract” ideas on the sort of writing standard the university was after. Adam even read her tutor’s articles and took notes on how arguments were constructed and believe he wrote more effectively after that. Ava also concurred that writing samples were essential for students to see how ideas were organized and expressed correctly.

Edith did not share the same view and professed her dislike for it. She saw sample writing equated with something terrifying that could restrict her scope of thinking. Edith felt she could write better than most sample essays, regardless if she took a peek or not. Whether sample essays were a good source for writing support, for Edith was a subjective question because what constitutes ‘good’ academic writing is a rather idiosyncratic to many.

The only issue raised regarding sample essays was the tutor’s reluctance to share them. When they do, according to the participants, they question its quality as some the participants deemed as poorly written and spotted numerous grammatical mistakes.

6. Discussion

The participants in this study are international postgraduate students and so often regarded as NNES. This meant that they were to write following the host country’s and/or university’s academic writing conventions. Drawing from the findings, as English is regarded by the participants as their second or foreign language, the participants felt the need to write like a native and writing is an activity where people transmit their ideas onto paper (Sinar, Putri & Putri, 2021). Pennycook (1996) stated that when writing in English, it meant an L2 writer is writing in another language and often this starts with a form of imitation. L1 plays a role of scaffolding L2 (Romli, Aziz & Krish, 2021) in a variety of areas such as grammar, comprehension as well as vocabulary usage. This insinuates that they needed to employ certain strategies to help them to write like a native, thus employing strategies mentioned in the findings section that included getting feedback from tutors, use sample essays and proof reading services.

As mentioned before, Ava and Adam were able to develop their academic writing and perhaps it is due to their English language proficiency and ability to improve to write according to the university's writing conventions. This was not the case with the other three participants. It is understood why Cindy may not be able to academically write soundly but Julia and Edith were quite competent. For example, although Edith possessed an IELTS band score of 8 and spoke fluently during interviews, Edith failed to progress and maintained marks of 60s. This supports the view that having English proficiency was crucial but was not enough to ensure academic success and students need to demonstrate analytical skills and the ability to synthesise information (Neumann, Padden & McDonough, 2019).

Realizing that some of the participants needed help with academic writing, they turned to proof reading and proof reading services are becoming more readily available. At a touch of an internet search, there seemed to be no clear boundary in deciding what or when can proof reading be regarded as unethical (Kim & La Bianca, 2018) as expressed by the participants in the findings. This argument went back as far as Harris and Silva (1993) who reported a split in perception on this matter where half saw proof reading's ethical approach regarded as cheating and had no part in the learning experience because some students acknowledged corrections blindly without understanding or with no interest to know why. The other half saw it in a more positive manner where students are actively learning in framing their writing (Harwood, Austin & Macaulay, 2009). Perhaps, this would ring true for students like Ava who learnt from a native speaker's expectations and writing conventions.

Edith's skeptical view on proof reader's effectiveness in tackling problems encountered by NNES was also presented in the data. According to Harwood, Austin & Macaulay (2009) some proof readers gave NNES superficial impression on their writing problem, often identifying them as grammatical and syntactical when the problem could be something more significant such as lack of subject knowledge, lack of argument (criticality) and even writing structure. Using proof readers could also mislead students to think that their writing problems are superficial and fixable via proof reading services resulting in negligence on the students' part to acquire academic writing skills as well as other significant academic literacy dexterity.

Due to such differences in perception as pointed out by the participants, it is rather hard to pinpoint the boundary of when proof reading ends and the creation of meaning starts. This thus spawns the dilemma at what level of proof reading became inappropriate. How these services are used is key and there is the concern that proof reading could cause a sense of dependence and almost an addiction, especially where high stakes assignments are involved. Although Ava said she learnt through her proof reading experience, she was also reaffirmed that she would continue to use such services to help eradicate her 'American slang' problem instead of resolving the problem herself.

The participants have also voiced out the inadequacy of the university's writing support centre. Perhaps, there was a communication breakdown regarding its role and function. Making use of such writing centres and being espoused in a "collaborative negotiation" (Alowayid, 2020; Kim, 2020) could familiarize students with role of the writing centre tutors and take full advantage of their services.

From the findings, it can be drawn that none of the participants experienced Govender and Alcock's (2020) conceptual idea on tutors' support and writing support could result in academic development and/or success. Rather, according to the data, the participant seems to benefit most when they have a positive relationship in their community of practice as well as possessing metacognitive strategies for academic development as portrayed by Ava and Adam. Having a positive relationship with one's tutor can also help foster a positive emotion which could be key to one's self-regulation (Scott et al, 2011). Previous studies also show peer feedback and support is sought after in academic settings, often resulting in positive outcomes (Leki 1995, Shang-Butler, 2015). Ava and Adam both had a good working relationship with their tutors and peers that their feedback provided them with beneficial input. Julia, Edith and Cindy encountered difficulties in establishing relationships. Especially for Cindy, her language competence resulted her to be unable to form any friendship at all and she was left on her own. In Julia and Edith's case, it solely due to distrust. Thus, it can be deduced that perhaps the participants did wish for peer feedback and support, yet unable to do so because of the time constraints of their assignment due dates and limited time available to build relationship and trust. Julia, Edith and Cindy also seem to not possess the metacognitive skills essential at postgraduate level, evident in their insufficiency to understand the writing demands of the university regardless their tutor's feedback or proof reader's guidance as reflected in their assignment marks.

7. Conclusions

The idea of whether having a proof reader can help with one's academic writing is proven to be a subjective matter. Participants like Ava benefitted from it while others did not. Adam did not engage in such activity and still manage to improve his academic writing one assignment at a time. Edith and Julia were more than competent with the English language, yet their inability to follow the university's writing conventions failed to ensure much academic writing

development and score improvement. Cindy was linguistically incompetent and relied heavily on proof reader but failed to make any academic impression and failed three of her assignments. What can be insinuated here is that proof reading is just another writing strategy and if used correctly, could become a learning advantage but is not always necessary for academic writing development. English language proficiency is fundamental especially when learning in an Anglophone university, but needs to be complemented with synthetical and analytical skills that could be applied to academic writing.

The choice of whether or to engage with a proof reader or not rests solely in the hands of the students. It would be impossible for academic institutions to prohibit students from such activity especially when their own writing support for international students were still lacking. This is not to say that international students require special treatment but language support exists everywhere for international students (not just Anglophone countries) as it is understood, language barrier would affect academic performance. Furthermore, the existence of covert proof reader that would not abide by the institution's proof reading guidelines and students' explicit knowledge of this would mean that students would need to be more creative in hiding their unethical writing tracks. What could be done as mentioned by Harwood, is to ensure academic staff and students be made extensively aware of what is regarded as acceptable or non-acceptable when undertaking proof reading services. In other words, the need for academic literacy plays an important role and hope students would abide by the guidelines and regulation set by the institution.

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