Senior Brazilian researchers' experiences and practices: perceived needs of novice researchers to become part of the community

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Abstract: Academic writing in English challenges graduate students and novice researchers (FLOWERDEW, 2000; NYGAARD, 2015; HYLAND, 2019). Their inexperience in writing academic genres contrasts with the demand to publish research articles in renowned journals in order to complete their degrees and advance in their careers. Research shows that novices need support in EAP instruction (WINGATE, 2015), understanding publication as a social practice (NYGAARD, 2015; CURRY and LILLIS, 2019), and English language proficiency (FERGUSON et al., 2011) to successfully engage in the activity. Data were collected from 41 Brazilian researchers regarding their experiences and needs through an online questionnaire to find significant themes for exploration in this qualitative study.

Keywords: Novice Researchers. Senior Brazilian Researchers. EAP Writing Instruction.

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1. Introduction

In the past 30 years, a shift of value has occurred in the academic world: research articles (RAs) published in peer-reviewed, high-ranking English-medium journals have become more important than other types of written production (LILLIS; CURRY, 2010; CORCORAN; ENGLANDER, 2016; SALÖ, 2017). Research output now in the form of RAs, associated with bibliometric parameters (journal impact factor, citations, h-index) is the leading tool for assessing scholars' academic production and the prestige of the universities they represent.

The demand to publish has progressively reached doctoral students in most fields, who are required to successfully publish an article – preferably in a prestigious journal – in order to complete their degrees (SALÖ, 2017; ZARKOV, 2019). Additionally, instead of extensive monographs, doctoral students in some fields have been encouraged to produce compilation-type theses (SALÖ, 2017), in which they assemble published RAs of their own to compose their final work.

As a result, publication has become an increasingly competitive activity, in which demands on scholars are not always backed by the institutions with the necessary support (FERGUSON et al., 2011; HULTGREN, 2019). To the novice researcher – doctoral student or recently graduated doctor – publication in this environment is certainly highly challenging.

In the Brazilian context, graduate and postgraduate programs at universities are graded by a government agency – CAPES (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior), based on professors' and their supervised students' academic performances. Professors' research output accounts for up to 40% of the evaluation, and graduate and postgraduate students' theses and dissertations account for up to 35% (CAPES, 2017)[1]. The agency emphasizes that its assessment complies with international standards, underscoring its adherence to the overall tendency to value the publication of RAs in indexed English-medium journals. In order to keep their graduate and postgraduate programs, universities need to have high quality RAs published regularly, which exerts pressure on their academic staff and students.

Documented accounts of how multilingual researchers engage in the activity of publishing RAs, including their strategies and struggles

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1   An appraisal of the faculty's qualifications, their academic activities and the social impact of the graduate programme completes the evaluation.

are plentiful – although by no means exhaustive or complete – especially in Asia (FLOWERDEW, 2000; LEE; LEE, 2013; CARGILL et al., 2017; XUAN; CADMAN, 2017; LUO; HYLAND, 2019) and in Eastern and Southern Europe (LILLIS; CURRY, 2010; PEREZ-LLANTADA et al., 2011; BENNET, 2014; MURESAN; PEREZ-LLANTADA, 2014; BURGESS, 2017). However, there are few studies in the Brazilian context on this topic. Two main qualitative studies describe the process of graduate students producing RAs and engaging in publishing: Cunha et al. (2014) report on graduate students from the medical field, and Martinez and Graf (2016) from the engineering field. In another research, Ferreira (2015) describes the development of a group of post/graduate students in the field of energy during an academic writing course.

Literature registers that discourse conventions and rhetoric are fundamental for multilingual scholars to participate in the publication activity (LILLIS; CURRY, 2010; HYLAND, 2019; TRIBBLE, 2019), as well as general L2 proficiency level (FLOWERDEW, 2000; LILLIS; CURRY, 2010; PEREZ-LLANTADA et al., 2011). Wingate (2015) claims that the traditional support given to L2 students in British universities through remedial work on language fails to address the real issues of academic writing. She states that what is necessary in order to improve academic writing is a more comprehensive approach to academic literacy, including the social practices of the community.

Although good command of English does not entail the ability to write RAs or participate in the research community, a large bibliometric study also established a strong correlation between self-declared L2 proficiency level and the volume of publications of Brazilian scholars in international journals (VASCONCELOS et al., 2008; 2009). Further, Ferreira (2015) indicates that in her study, graduate students with poor command of L2 profited little from EAP writing instruction. While low L2 proficiency level can constitute a hindrance to academic literacy, knowledge of general English is not necessarily connected to success in research writing for publication, especially without the disciplinary knowledge and awareness of the practices of the academic field.

This research has collected data from Brazilian scholars who successfully engage in the practice of research writing for publication in English. These academics have trodden the path from being novice to becoming experienced, and by indicating in which areas they encountered the most difficulties, they also suggest which difficulties need addressing.

The aim of this study is to gather information about the support novices require to be better equipped in order to participate more fully in the activity of publication of RAs in English-medium journals.

This study is focused on three main research questions:

1) How much does academic writing instruction influence scholars' ability and confidence in RA writing and publishing?
2) Is writing in English an additional challenge in the activity of RA writing and publishing?
3) What support do scholars consider the most important for novices to successfully participate in the activity?

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2. Methodology

The data collection for this study constitutes the first phase of a larger qualitative research project on the activity of research writing and publication by Brazilian scholars. The data presented here were gathered through an online survey sent to researchers who have had their RAs published in international journals in English. Researchers were invited to participate mainly through a request to the head of the department at their respective institutions, who forwarded the invitation at their discretion. Some scholars were reached through suggestion by their peers. Responses were collected over three months, and obtained from 41 participants, 23 engineers and 18 applied social scientists, from two renowned private universities, two public universities and one public research institute. Consent forms were signed and approval by the ethical committee was duly obtained.[2] Response from other fields was low, for reasons which have not been investigated.

As all participants in this survey are Brazilian, Portuguese was assumed to be their first language. A specific question whether any of them had a different L1 or were bilingual was not asked. English is considered a foreign language in this study, although there might be exceptions.

The questionnaire comprised 23 questions regarding researchers' academic writing instruction, self-confidence in writing, publishing practices, resources used and perceived challenges. Most were multiple-choice or Likert-scale-type questions, with a few open-ended items for additional information or comments.

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2 This study is registered on Plataforma Brasil - Committee of Ethics in Research (*https://plataformabrasil.saude.gov.br/*) *under the number 82705917.2.0000.5390.*

In this qualitative research, the information from the survey is used to indicate tendencies and identify themes for further exploration, rather than to represent the demography of a specific sector of the Brazilian research community. As the respondents are engaged in research in different environments – public and private universities, a public research institute – it may be assumed that their experiences and academic activity represent a reasonable range of Brazilian researchers in their fields, contributing with a variety of relevant topics to be explored.

From the large amount of data provided by the scholars through the survey, this study focuses on the research questions above. Issues are complex and interrelated, but the results have been organized into four main topics: 1) participants' academic writing instruction, 2) foreign language-related issues, 3) other challenges, and 4) perceived needs of novice researchers. For the purpose of this study, the discipline-specific differences were less relevant than the overall tendency, therefore they have not been detailed in this paper.

3. Results

3.1 Academic writing instruction

The survey results indicate that few of these scholars received institutionally organized academic writing instruction at their universities, in both fields researched. In Portuguese, over one third (15 out of 41) indicated not having received instruction of any type, while only about one quarter (10 out of 41) reported having had academic writing courses at university. The guidance by supervisors is shown as significant both in Portuguese (14 out of 41) and in English (8 out of 41), which seems to be the main instruction offered through the university. Unfortunately, lack of training of masters and doctoral theses supervisors as EAP instructors and literacy brokers (MARTINEZ; GRAF, 2016) may result in variable levels of consistency in the pedagogical interventions and guidance offered.

The mismatch between the increasing pressure for publication and the insufficient opportunities of academic writing instruction provided by universities seems to have impelled researchers to seek instruction autonomously through a variety of means (Figure 1, Figure 2). From the data collected, very few researchers have had sources of feedback or interaction while trying to learn how to write a research article.

For writing RAs in English, reading published articles (12 out of 41) was the most frequently mentioned means of instruction. Even though reading is an invaluable source of information about the practices and conventions of communities in writing and publishing, reading, alone – without other interventions such as guidance or feedback – is unlikely to efficiently develop one's academic writing abilities. It is also doubtful whether scholars are aware of rhetorical moves common in RAs in English in order to understand and incorporate those features in their own texts.

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Figure 1. Academic writing instruction
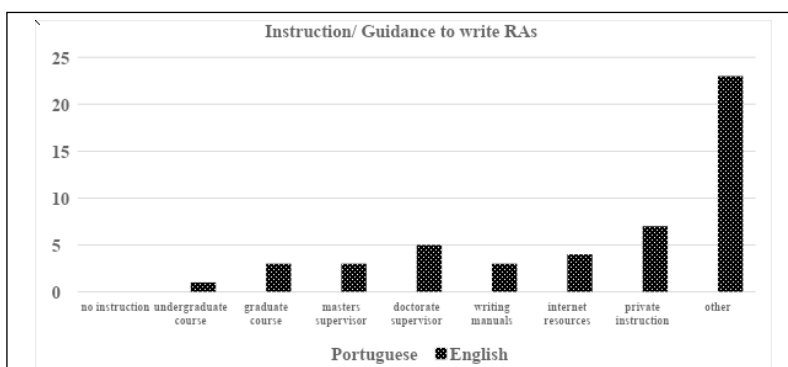
Source: Elaborated by the author

It is interesting that despite having received little or no academic writing instruction in Portuguese (L1), most participants are very confident in their ability to write RAs (Figure 3), with tacit knowledge apparently playing an important role.

On the other hand, while all participants recognized that they had had to actively learn how to write RAs in English (L2), their confidence is much lower; which implies that the methods available to them have not generally been efficient or satisfactory, in their view.

Apart from inadequate EAP writing instruction, the difference in scholars' evaluation of their abilities to write RAs in L1 and L2 can also be attributed to their low confidence in their command of L2. Perez-Llantada et al. (2011) indicate that to be the case with Spanish researchers writing in English as a foreign language.

Wingate (2015) supports that the quality of academic writing is more strongly connected with the quality of overall academic literacy – reading and writing practices which include the awareness of

epistemological and sociocultural values of the community – than with language proficiency itself; therefore, the provision of support to improve academic writing needs to comprise the improvement of academic literacy practices in tertiary education. In the Brazilian context, the evidence that such practices are in place is unclear and still needs to be studied. It might be the case in Portuguese, if the confidence displayed by scholars about their ability to write RAs in L1 may be considered as evidence, although research on the topic remains to be conducted. Nevertheless, if Wingate's (2015) hypothesis is considered, there is clearly a great need to improve academic literacy practices in L2, as participants indicate that most reading and writing of academic texts is done independently of guidance.

Figure 2. Other means of instruction
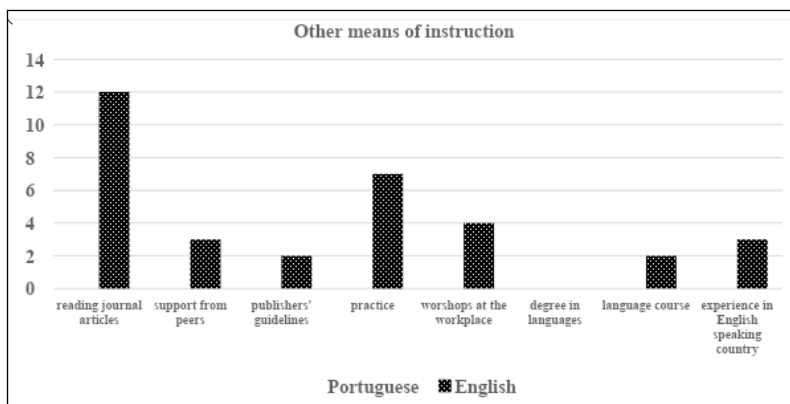
Source: Elaborated by the author

Participants recognize that the ability to write RAs in L1 does not transfer directly into L2, as EAP writing instruction is considered as the most pressing need of novice researchers (Figure 6). Scholars are aware that simply translating the words from L1 to L2 will neither convey their meaning to the reader, nor satisfy the requirements of international journals. In these scholars' experience, the lack of organized, solid EAP writing instruction has clearly been a source of struggle in their careers.

3.2 Foreign language-related issues
While non-nativeness is not considered as a disadvantage by some authors (HULTGREN, 2019; HYLAND, 2019; TRIBBLE, 2019), producing RAs in English still requires L2 users to write in cohesive, comprehensible

grammar and lexis, in addition to rhetorical features which characterize the genre. Multilingual scholars have shown awareness that their limited range of linguistic resources also narrow the range of meanings they are able to express, especially if language brokerage such as professional translation and editing is not available (LILLIS; CURRY, 2010; PEREZ-LLANTADA et al., 2011).

When the participants in this study evaluated their own ability to write RAs, they showed that they are far more confident in their writing in Portuguese than in English. In doing so, they acknowledge that they do not write as easily or as well in English as they do in Portuguese. All participants rated their ability to write a research article from "good" to "excellent" in Portuguese, half of them considering themselves "excellent". In English, while most consider their ability as "good" or "very good", only three participants rated themselves as "excellent". Additionally, six participants evaluated their ability in English as "weak" or "poor", while none did so for Portuguese. Individually, most participants (38 out of 41) rated their ability to write RAs lower in English than in Portuguese, at least by one grade (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Participants' self-evaluation of ability to write research articles in Portuguese and English
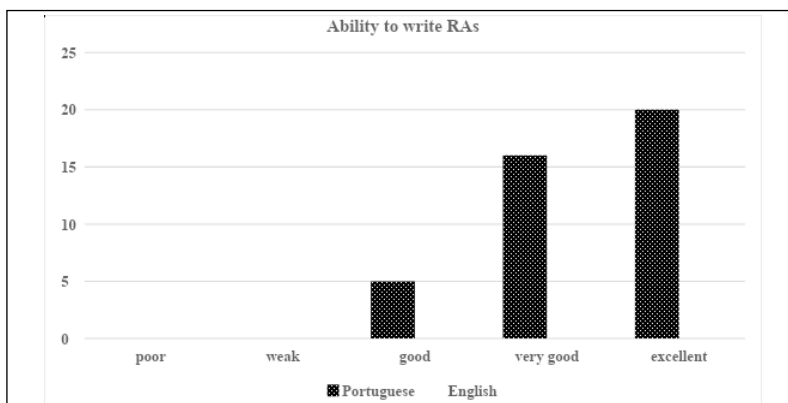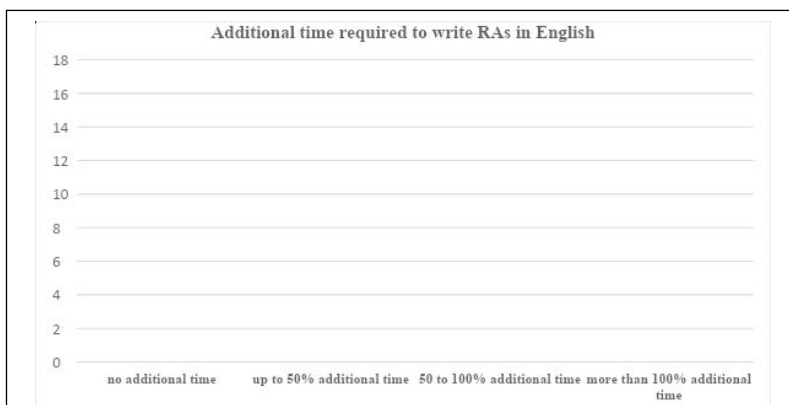

Source: Elaborated by the author

According to the survey, producing research articles in English increases scholars' workload, commonly requiring from 50% to over 100% additional time compared to writing in Portuguese (Figure 4). Apart from the need to revise the text more thoroughly and use

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resources such as dictionaries to write in L2, additional time is also required to adapt one's text to include rhetorical moves such as those described by SWALES (1990) in his CARS model, which is less common in RAs in Portuguese (HIRANO, 2009).

Figure 4. Additional time required to write research articles in English, compared to Portuguese

Source: Elaborated by the author

Knowing how to write a research article in English entails not only general competence in the use of grammar and vocabulary, but also familiarity with deeper rhetorical and organizational features of texts – e.g. establishing what gaps can be found in previous research, claiming to contribute to the knowledge construction, etc. - which are part of Anglophone conventions. Further, scholars who are aware of basic structural differences between Portuguese and English writing are likely to spend time trying to shape their texts accordingly. Santos and Silva (2016) illustrate that Portuguese writers tend to use a large number of subordinates in sentences and paragraphs which are far longer than it is common in English, features which would require adjusting the structures to meet the expectations of an audience used to reading texts shaped in a certain way.

Even if the participants may not express awareness of rhetorical and organizational features directly, they mention difficulties in "communicating their research in an interesting way" and "emphasizing the importance of their research" (Figure 5). Such difficulties may also be related to their lower command of L2 and the limited rhetorical resources they are able to use.

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The perception of the inadequacy of participants' command of the foreign language to express ideas surfaces in this survey, corroborating with existing literature (LILLIS; CURRY, 2010; PEREZ-LLANTADA et al., 2011; SALÖ, 2017). RA authors' perceptions are also reinforced by reviewers' and editors' negative comments of their use of the English language and by requests that they "have the text revised by a native speaker". In response, in addition to improving their L2 language proficiency by studying English autonomously and taking English language courses, scholars have also reported to work on revising and proofreading their texts more thoroughly, and have sometimes resorted to outsourcing translation, revision and editing services in order to meet the requirements of the journals. From information provided by participants, however, budgetary constraints often make outsourcing language and literacy brokerage unviable.

Since the practice of scholars participating in this study does not commonly include having their RAs professionally translated from Portuguese to English, the ability to write their own texts is a requirement when producing RAs in English. Thus, their command of L2 has a significant impact on the quality of the communication in the RAs produced (PEREZ-LLANTADA et al., 2011). Also, a reasonably good knowledge of L2 is important for researchers to fully profit from EAP writing instruction (FERREIRA, 2015). Research writing for publication in L2 is a demanding activity, requiring from authors not only enough knowledge of English to communicate their research findings and negotiate meaning with editors and peer reviewers, but also of rhetorical resources and disciplinary conventions.

Various authors – notably from applied linguistics - defend that participation in research writing and publication depends less on L2 proficiency than academic literacy, familiarity with disciplinary conventions and social practices of the community (WINGATE, 2015; HYLAND, 2019; TRIBBLE, 2019). Tribble (2019, p. 58) further affirms that nativeness should not be considered a language standard, being "undefinable, indescribable and unhelpful". However, in practice, the fact that journal gatekeepers from different fields provide feedback to L2 writers recommending that they should "have their texts revised by a native speaker" seems to contradict such claims. Different research communities appear to have diverse practices in this regard; therefore, a good command of L2 may still be a requirement for participation in

some communities, in addition to knowledge of the specificities of the field. It remains to be explored whether these are common practices in specific fields, and whether there might be other interests - such as commercial or political - involved.

3.3 Other Challenges

Beyond the issues related to knowledge of L2 and EAP writing instruction, challenges perceived by the participants include especially learning the social practices of their fields (SALÖ, 2017; CURRY; LILLIS, 2019; HYLAND, 2019; TRIBBLE, 2019): characteristics and expectations of journals and audiences, keeping up with the current discussions, and understanding the particular behaviors of the community of their field.

One of the challenges pointed out by the participants in this study was selecting a journal which might be interested in publishing the work produced by the researchers. The fact that there is a very large number of journals, each with its very specific goals, requirements and audiences – not to mention the issues associated to journal ranking - complicates the task of selecting a journal which may accept their RA for publication. Knowledge about journals seems to be acquired through experience – by reading articles and following the evolution of research topics and discussions over time. Even for senior scholars, taking part in the discussion in the international scene is not considered a simple activity.

According to the survey, few scholars – despite their experience - find it very easy to select a journal to submit their work (Figure 5). Most still consider it a fairly difficult task, which indicates how complex it is to assess one's research work and resulting article against the backdrop of the full range of topics and ongoing discussions in their communities. While scholars desire to have their articles published in the highest-ranking journal which will accept their RAs, submitting their work to top journals is, in general, rarely successful. Rejection rates can reach up to 95% in well-ranked journals, and only submissions which match the journal's range of interests perfectly will be considered for publication (LAPLACA et al., 2017; ZARKOV, 2019).

Rhetorical aspects (HYLAND, 2019) - the ability to communicate research results in an interesting way to the reader and the ability to emphasize the relevance of the research are also pointed out as challenges in participating in the activity of scholarly publication (Figure 5). Scholars recognize that these are key features in successfully

having their article accepted by a journal, but they still find it difficult to incorporate those into their texts. If those features are still challenging for scholars already engaging in the publication activity, they are certainly more so for novices.

While novice researchers may actually produce good quality work, the fact that they may be unknown in the community could be unfavorable to the acceptance by higher-ranking journals. As research in the medical field (CUNHA et al., 2014) has found, having a well-known thesis supervisor as a co-author can be decisive in succeeding in this competitive environment. Experienced co-authors can, especially if they are confident, guide novices through the difficulties in the process of shaping their texts and selecting appropriate journals to submit their RAs (MARTINEZ; GRAF, 2016). From the survey, however, it is clear that scholars do not show themselves as highly confident in their rhetorical abilities or in their knowledge and ability to select journals to submit their RAs.

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Figure 5. Difficulties in the process of publishing
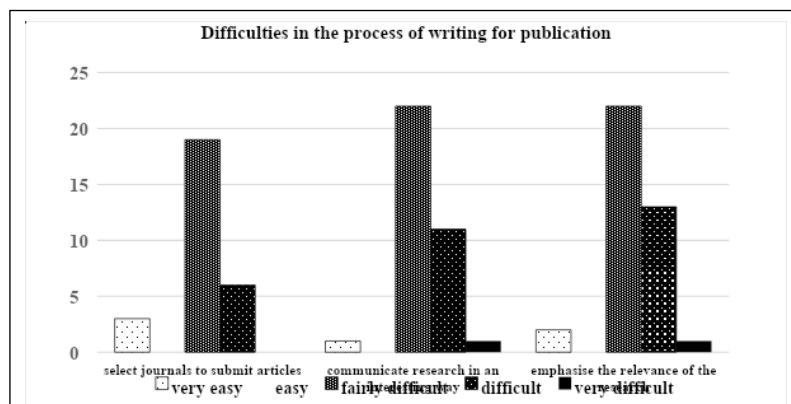
Source: Elaborated by the author

3.4 Perceived needs of novice researchers

The participants' perception of the support needed by novice researchers included not only improvement of their competence in producing their own RAs – by improving English language proficiency and seeking EAP writing instruction, but also having additional literacy and language brokerage (Figure 6). It is worth observing that none of the items of support mentioned is widely available to researchers in Brazil, regardless of their experience. Resources for research are not abundant

and are being further reduced (CAPES, 2020); as a consequence, building the costs of professional literacy and language brokerage into research budgets is becoming even less feasible.

Participants almost unanimously agree that EAP writing instruction – which very few received as part of their graduate curriculum – is key in enabling novices to participate in international publication activity. Another point of convergence is that finding the appropriate journals to submit one's RAs can be a major challenge for novices, so support in this area is necessary to improve their chances of having their work published.

The support novices need expressed by participants seems to coincide with the support these experienced scholars lacked when starting their activity of writing for publication in international journals. The provision of the support mentioned could certainly contribute greatly to increasing novices' publications – assuming the quality of the research were up to international standards. However, from the items listed, professional revision, translation and editing services are not within reach of Brazilian scholars in general, for financial reasons.

Figure 6. Support needed by novice researchers
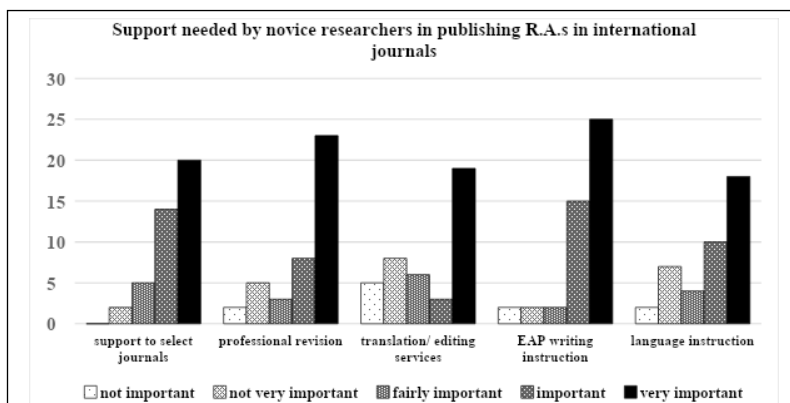
Source: Elaborated by the author

In the next section, novices' and experienced researchers' needs expressed in the survey and in the literature, and possible alternatives for addressing them will be discussed.

4. Discussion

While EAP writing instruction appears as a key issue in enabling novice researchers to participate in the activity of research writing for publication, there are questions regarding its approach – genre-informed, academic literacies, critical approaches - and also the parameters of L2 to be aimed at. Tribble (2019) warns that EAP pedagogy should adopt an approach which helps novices understand and learn the practices which will allow their engagement in the activity, rather than one that actively criticizes current practices and resist them. He also defends that in RA writing, provided that the author has disciplinary expertise and ability to communicate within their disciplinary community in English, their L1 – whether English or not – is irrelevant to the activity of research writing and publication.

It appears, however, from the information provided by participants, that not all disciplinary communities may be willing to accommodate standards of English language which are not considered "native" – a questionable parameter (TRIBBLE, 2019), but still in use – while some seem to be more flexible in this regard. Further research seems necessary to learn how different disciplines conceptualize English as a language for international research communication, which would certainly improve the understanding of what participation in those communities entails.

Despite the claims that having to write in English is not the most important obstacle to participating in RA publishing in international journals (HABIBIE, 2019; HYLAND, 2019; HULTGREN, 2019), it seems that for Brazilian scholars it contributes to further complicate their activity. The information gathered through the survey indicates that Brazilian scholars struggle until they achieve publication in English-medium journals: scholars' L2 proficiency may vary due to uneven EFL pedagogy and learning opportunities (THE BRITISH COUNCIL, 2015), but all are required to produce RAs in English, for which few have received any formal instruction. Since professional language and literacy brokerage are expensive services, few scholars have access to them, so most are left to their own devices. Due to necessity, scholars persevere in the endeavor, reading published RAs, studying writing manuals and other available materials, and through exchanges with peer reviewers and editors, slowly learn how to write RAs in English, finally succeeding in publishing their work and gaining some confidence in producing their own texts.

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Even though the little academic writing instruction received in L1 does not seem to affect Brazilian scholars' confidence in producing RAs in Portuguese, the general lack of formal EAP writing instruction seems to be a significant factor in undermining their confidence in producing RAs in English. This is also reflected in the almost unanimous agreement that EAP writing instruction is the most important support needed by novice researchers in order to succeed in publishing their articles. This lack of instruction is likely to have affected negatively most scholars' careers and early attempts to engage in international publication.

Since institutional demands and assessment parameters have been changed to follow international trends (CAPES, 2017) – with publication in highly ranked journals in English valued above other forms of academic production - scholars have had to adapt to new rules, such as regularly producing and publishing RAs in English, competing for space in indexed journals, negotiating meaning and content with journal reviewers and editors in English. Universities and government agencies seem to have taken scholars' abilities and knowledge for granted, providing little support in L2 – with the exception to the "Idiomas sem Fronteiras" program, discontinued in 2019 - and EAP instruction, or language and literacy brokerage. The results of this study reveal that whereas senior scholars have learned to cope with demands, few are comfortable participating in the activity, as well as confident providing guidance to novices.

Participants have indicated that resources and policy changes are necessary to facilitate and increase the participation of novices in the activity. The support necessary appointed by scholars in view of the demands for publication is evidently not being addressed adequately by universities, research institutes and government agencies. Despite budgetary issues, there is support that senior scholars could assist with, if they had training as literacy brokers (MARTINEZ; GRAF, 2016) and a good structure to acquire and share more information about journals in their respective fields. Such training and structure could have a very positive impact on novices' activity, since experienced scholars have the potential to guide a large number of novices and function as multipliers of knowledge throughout their working careers.

Additionally, provision of L2 language instruction associated with EAP writing instruction will certainly bring positive results, contributing to making scholars more self-confident when writing their

RAs in English. If novice researchers are expected to join the activity of writing RAs and publishing in English-medium journals, it is clear that universities should provide regularly organized EAP writing courses and a systematic program of L2 improvement in order to equip their graduate and postgraduate students for what will be demanded of them.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study indicate that support for publication cannot be effective with a single action, but only with a network of actions. Senior researchers need support to become more confident and better able to provide guidance to novices, possibly by acquiring declarative knowledge on their procedural/ experiential knowledge of the activity. EAP writing instruction, as well as L2 instruction should benefit most researchers, not only by effectively improving their abilities, but also making them more confident.

Because budgetary constraints in a developing country are a given, it is essential to place investments wisely. If government agencies and universities aim at competing internationally in the production and communication of knowledge, it seems that investing on a key network of support would be more productive than expecting that scholars succeed in doing so on their own. By providing L2 and EAP instruction, as well as support for senior scholars to assist novices, universities and agencies can certainly strengthen the community and expect more scholars to participate actively in international research writing and publishing.

This study is based on a small-scale data collection, limited to participants from two disciplinary fields who volunteered their views. While providing a glimpse into the range and depth of issues, the information gathered possibly represents only a fraction of the spectrum of the complex activity of research writing for publication by Brazilian scholars. The participation of researchers from a more diverse pool of disciplines may be expected to raise a variety of other relevant issues to be investigated. Even though some of the themes which the participants indicated as important have been explored, many more still remain to be studied.

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