Academic Writing at Babeş-Bolyai University. A Case Study

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Abstract Research-focused higher education institutions can achieve scientific visibility, research performance, and excellence in teaching and research that is validated by internationally relevant publications by improving and maintaining the academic writing competencies of their researchers. Our case study presents the dynamics of trends and initiatives regarding academic writing at Babeş-Bolyai University over the last 5 years. It focuses on the developments that have led to the launch of the present training program aimed at developing the research competencies needed to publish relevant research findings, output, or data in English and German academic publications. The research methods used in this chapter include document analysis, project design and results analysis, direct observation, and interviews. Our results offer an insight into the organizational variables and mechanisms that could lead to the development of specific academic writing programs as part of a comprehensive institutional research strategy.

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1   Introduction

In this era dominated by the "publish or perish" maxim, when individual as well as institutional performance is mostly measured in terms of published work, academic writing skills have become an important factor for achieving success in the competitive world of research and academia.

With most traditional top-ranked universities have academic writing centers and provide academic writing courses for students at all levels, studies show that academic writing skills are not automatically acquired (Johns 1997; Street 1999; Poel and Gasiorek 2012). Academic writing skills development initiatives have become an urgent necessity, particularly in universities without a tradition in developing dedicated writing programs that aim to gain international recognition as research universities or world-class universities (WCU).

Research universities are seen nowadays by researchers, politicians, and academic staff as central for a knowledge-based society and economy (Salmi 2009). Defined as being "complex institutions with multiple academic and societal roles," research universities have two major purposes: as national institutions to "contribute to culture, technology, and society" and as international institutions to "link to global intellectual and scientific trends" (Altbach 2011, p. 65). Research universities that have historically been a nation's elite institutions and trained the best minds of the country are being confronted with their international mission to also gain and maintain their place in international research developments. Especially for public universities, this role has been challenged significantly in the last years by the massification of education, the rise of the private sector, and the effects of economic crises on the funding available for research in universities (Altbach 2011). This development has led to several important changes at the level of higher education national systems in terms of the status and funding of the universities as well as the development of a tendency towards the creation of world-class universities (WCU) at the national level.

In Romania, there have been a number of attempts to evaluate research carried out at universities and to allocate funding based on research-performance indicators. Starting in 2000, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași and Babeș-Bolyai University (BBU) in Cluj-Napoca initiated a process to identify a set of criteria for the classification of Romanian universities. In addition, in 2008 a Ministerial Ordinance was issued in order to establish an Institutional Development Fund that was intended for universities aiming to become WCUs to compete for funds; however, due to lack of official commitment, this financial instrument was not properly implemented. The latest initiative, starting in 2011, has classified Romanian universities into three categories: (1) teaching-focused universities, (2) teaching and research universities or teaching and artistic creation universities, and (3) advanced-research and teaching universities. BBU was classified under the third category.

Nevertheless, the differentiation of higher education institutions based on performance and excellence relied on the introduction of quality indicators in the university financing mechanism. These criteria have been constantly developed; for example, in 2008, quality indicators represented 30% of the total budgetary financing amount (Agachi et al. 2011).

The research focus at the institutional level preceded the design of a national research strategy, with a clear scheme of differentiated allocations of financial resources.

Consequently, strategic developments regarding internationalization, the use of English as a research and publishing language, attracting research funds, and becoming visible at an international level were key factors in transforming BBU into a research university able compete at an international level for the status of WCU.

2 The Role of Academic Writing in Increasing Research Visibility at the International Level

The efficacy and usefulness of different aspects of academic writing initiatives have been analyzed in various studies. Rickard et al. (2009) showed how a formal 1-week writing course followed by monthly group meetings for a two-year period increased the average number of in print publications of the attending group from 0.5 to 1.2 per person/year. One of the most important conclusions of the study is that writing for publication is a skill that can be learned and evaluated during such a program.

Storch and Tapper (2009) analyzed the impact of a postgraduate EAP course with a focus on structure, accuracy, and academic vocabulary. With regard to structure, they acknowledged the fact that during postgraduate studies all students improved this aspect of their writing due to exposure to academic texts in their current studies. However, students enrolled in the course credited their improvement to the course. Analysis of language fluency showed mixed results, with no significant change over time, while the use of academic vocabulary statistically improved. The use of qualitative and quantitative methods in their study validated the conclusion that this institutional approach to academic writing development has a positive impact and is measurable in quantitative terms.

Several studies present formal and informal successful approaches to teaching academic writing. The use of portfolios was proposed by Romova and Andrew (2011), the efficacy of including academic writing tasks in a traditional programming course was analyzed by Cilliers (2012), and the effect of a collaborative working group was presented in Nesset et al. (2014). Other studies have presented findings related to particular aspects of academic writing such as paraphrasing (Hirvela and Du 2013) and acquisition of lexical phrases (Li and Schmitt 2009). A review of previous academic writing interventions can be found in McGrailet et al. (2006).

All these studies focused on measurable effects of proposed interventions in terms of quality of writing. Poel and Gasiorek (2012) presented an efficacy-focused approach with emphasis on students' perception of themselves as writers, arguing for an English writing program that explicitly addresses disciplinary expectations for academic writing. In addition, Perpignanet et al. (2007) showed that academic writing courses led to important secondary outcomes related to personal development that were unrelated to writing in English. Eighty-four percent of participants involved in this study acknowledged the existence of such outcomes; most of the subjects identified them as other skills (related to reading, thinking, and organizing) and effectiveness (increased expectations and confidence and reduced fear of criticism). Other byproducts mentioned were awareness of the meaning of writing, broadening of the knowledge base, behavior in a professional context, learning the meaning of learning, social interaction, and creativity.

Gopee and Deane's (2013) analysis of how students perceived institutional and non-institutional support for academic writing presented findings indicating that universities should provide a dedicated writing support center with appropriate human resources offering one-on-one writing tutorials.

Based on these arguments regarding the role and efficacy of academic writing interventions, the initiatives in the academic writing programs at BBU are identified and analyzed below.

3   Research Questions and Methodology

In the context in which BBU defines itself as a research university, gaining leading positions in national and international research rankings/classifications and aiming to enter the top 500 universities, the objective of the present article is to offer potential answers to the following frequent inquiries about the role of academic writing in this specific strategic context:

– Which were the most relevant steps in developing specific academic writing training programs in English and German as part of doctoral education?
– What are the main perspectives of the major actors at the institutional level regarding the role of academic writing competencies in fostering the publication culture at the institutional level?
– What are the identified variables and mechanisms at the strategic institutional level that were perceived as playing a crucial role in increasing the visibility of BBU's scientific publications?

Using a mixed-method approach, as defined by Greene and Caracelli (2003) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2010), based on a "dialectic stance"[1] that combines

[1]As defined by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2010) based on previous definitions of Greene and Caracelli (2003) and Greene (2007), a "dialectic stance" is defined as the researchers' mental model that can encompass different paradigms in one single explanatory framework of the studied phenomenon.

document analysis, comparative analysis, direct observation, questionnaires, and interviews, we aim to identify and describe the different perspectives and mental models that are generated and used by different actors involved in the design and implementation of academic writing initiatives at BBU during 2008–2013.

Document Analysis The documents selected for analysis were produced during 2008–2013. Documents older than 2009 that were included in the research due to their impact on initiatives and phenomena that occurred during the study period: institutional strategic plan for 2008–2011 and the institutional strategic plan for 2012–2015.

Projects Analysis The projects designed and implemented by BBU between 2008 and 2013 in the field of doctoral and postdoctoral studies that proposed specific training to improve the academic writing competencies of doctoral students were selected and analyzed in order to identify the strategy that led to the inclusion of such trainings in the project design, the selection of the specific subjects, the trainers, and the results obtained in terms of publications.

Comparative Analysis The comparisons used data computed by the Research Department of BBU regarding the scientific production (published ISI papers) for the 2008–2013 period by different categories of projects.

Direct Observation Over the period of 2008–2013, some of the research team members were project managers of BBU's doctoral projects and took part in the analyses carried out for the elaboration of institutional research strategies as researchers and/or acted as trainers. The direct observations they made were investigated in the following areas: the impact of specific strategic decisions on designing specific projects, the relevance of the value given to academic/scientific writing as a component in the development of a competitive research staff, the needs expressed by doctoral and postdoctoral students regarding academic writing and publishing, and the impact of specific practices of different research schools.

Interviews Aiming to develop a more detailed image of the processes and variables that led to the development of a long-term program of academic writing at BBU, the vice-rectors for research and doctoral studies (3) and trainers from the implementation teams (2) were interviewed. The main structure of the interviews focused on the link between research strategy objectives and specific doctoral programs, including specific types of training for doctoral students, the perceived role of academic writing in developing research and publishing competencies, the preferred ways of developing academic writing skills, and the institutional variables and mechanisms supporting academic writing initiatives and stimulating the publishing process.

4 Perspectives and Discussions

Our research questions were generated by the reflections of different actors (doctoral students, teachers, researchers, and vice-rectors) over the 2008–2013 period that raised fundamental inquiries about the development and future of academic writing initiatives at BBU: What value are we assigning nowadays to scientific/academic writing? Do we—students, teachers, and publishers—still share a common value regarding writing? How can we nurture the value of critical, reflective, and creative academic writing in a time of high publishing pressure? It is our mission to teach students how to write or it is something that we still expect to just occur osmotically in the teaching and mentoring process?

The answers obtained, the data analyzed, the conclusions of the feedback, and evaluations of the implemented projects indicated the following general themes as a pattern for reflection regarding the process of the introduction of academic writing trainings at BBU:

1. Developing academic writing training programs at BBU as part of doctoral education
2. The role of academic writing competencies in fostering a publishing culture at an institutional level
3. Variables and mechanisms at a strategic level playing a role in supporting academic writing initiatives and in increasing the visibility of the scientific publications of BBU

4.1 Developing Academic Writing Training Programs at BBU as Part of Doctoral Education

One of the most relevant and important parts of BBU's institutional mission is its research mission. The Strategic Plan for 2008–2012 defined for the first time BBU's strategic goal "to become a world-class university," which could be accomplished through

- training and support for the most competitive researchers, with internationally acknowledged scientific results and
- training of innovators aiming to create new products and processes and to enrich the technological endowment of the global society.

Consequently, the research strategy of the university included several measures such as

- developing research evaluation exercises oriented towards the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the output,
- support for researchers to publish in international journals/ISI ranked journals,
- increasing researchers' visibility at the international level, and
- developing research centers with specific research programs and a dedicated infrastructure.

The 2012–2015 Research Strategy stressed again the university's commitment to ranking first among the Romanian universities and to accessing the Top 500 ARWU Shanghai Ranking. A special focus was given to the inter- and multidisciplinary research programs, centers (poles of excellence), and teams with appropriate funding allocations.

Doctoral education is seen institutionally as one of the major priorities in supporting the research mission of the university and promoting excellence in a scientific career (Gräfet et al. 2011)—an excellence that was one of the distinctive characteristics of BBU in its historical development as one of the country's leading institutions in both teaching and research. Doctoral education has been seen as an important process that supports institutional visibility in terms of international publications and its international presence in general. Due to the dynamics in recent years, BBU initiated several changes in order to adapt its agendas and redefine its goals.

(a) **Research agenda.** In order to maintain its position among the top three national research institutions, BBU continued investing in research projects based on its own research strengths and on relevant national research priorities. Several research areas of excellence have been established and, as a result, a project for investment in infrastructure of 15 million euro was secured and six projects totaling more than 26 million Euro for doctoral studies and postdoctoral research were contracted between 2008 and 2013.

(b) **Doctoral and postdoctoral training for career development.** Training programs, whether specific or general, have been integrated into projects financed through the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development (SOPHRD) in order to enhance research-management and research project-management skills among the participants. Training programs have been designed to be carried out in close cooperation with national or international experts/partners (such as the Center for Doctoral Studies of the University in Vienna and the House of Competences at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Leipzig University). It was the first time in the history of doctoral studies at BBU that specific measures dedicated to the enhancement of writing skills at the doctoral level were implemented in an organized manner for more than 5 years in a row. These initiatives were designed by teams selected by the vice-rectors for research and doctoral studies at the beginning of the first doctoral program financed by SOPHRD in 2009 and have been continuing since with the later support of the Institute for Doctoral Studies.

(c) **Exposure to different perspectives and different languages.** There have been two main institutional initiatives. First, doctoral schools in BBU have been open for cotutelle doctoral programs within the same field, but between BBU and foreign partners and in interdisciplinary fields, particularly in life sciences (in an effort to connect chemistry, biology, physics, medical research, etc.). Second, due to its multicultural mission, BBU developed cooperation at doctoral levels with partners that are vital for the future development of its Hungarian and German lines of study.

The inclusion of specific training programs aiming to develop research skills alongside the formal doctoral program started as an initiative with the launch of the first two strategic doctoral projects in 2009. The first training initiatives were developed in cooperation with experts from the University of Vienna and included several modules of training in academic writing, research management, and research project management, which were offered as compulsory courses for all the enrolled doctoral students (Pavlenko et al. 2014).

The succeeding generation of projects launched in 2010 added several partners at the international level in order to foster a specific component of researchers' education: internationalization of studies. The partnership offered opportunities to develop new forms of training in academic writing and research management, such as summer schools and courses offered at partner universities (University of Vienna, Regensburg University, University of Leipzig, and Karlsruhe Institute of Technology). Academic writing was considered a major component of doctoral education.

The design of the strategic doctoral and postdoctoral programs aimed at proposing a different approach to the doctoral training process relied on the following set of actions:

- Supplementary training programs at the institutional level with the aim of facilitating the interaction between doctoral students from different fields and developing certain specific complementary competencies
- Training of students in academic writing and research management—including research project design and implementation
- Internationalization of doctoral studies through cotutelle, research mobility (a period of 6–8 months of study abroad supported by the project) at partner institutions or other EU institutions, joint summer school between partner institutions on developing the research competencies of the doctoral students, especially related to promoting their research and research results
- Writing and publishing in international journals in English or other languages (each enrolled doctoral student had to, by the end of their PhD program, publish three papers from which at least one must be in an international journal)

The design of doctoral and postdoctoral grants focused especially on specific field challenges at the level of doctoral and postdoctoral programs and included specific training modules in research management and specific mechanisms to develop the publishing capacity of doctoral and postdoctoral students.

Following these evolutions, by the year 2012, the present project[2] was designed as a research-oriented project that aimed to demonstrate the efficacy of academic writing training at the doctoral level. The project was conceived as a complementary tool alongside doctoral programs offered by BBU's doctoral schools. Its aim was to

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[2] OPEN RES—Open School for Academic Self-improvement. Research, Academic Writing, and Career Management (PN-II-PCCA-2011-3.1-0682 212/2.07.2012 grant funded by UEFISCDI [www.uefiscdi.gov.ro] project website: http://econ.ubbcluj.ro/~rodica.lung/openres/ http://academic-writing.ro)

develop an efficient, optional program for the supplementary development of academic writing and research competencies. The project combines different types of modules: research methods, academic writing, research management, and career management as well as different training formats such as informal and non-formal. The project offers the academic writing training program in both English and German. The decision to offer training in English and German was based on the language preference of the academic staff for publishing and also on the fact that BBU is offering complete training routes at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral level in German (Aluaş et al. 2014, 2017).

4.2 Projects Facts

As a research institution, BBU has published extensively at the international level; a record of the ISI-ranked publications as the number of papers in the Web of Science Core Collection (all indexes, all types of papers) reflects a constant growth over the last 5 years from 692 in 2008 to 1024 in 2013 (see Fig. 1).
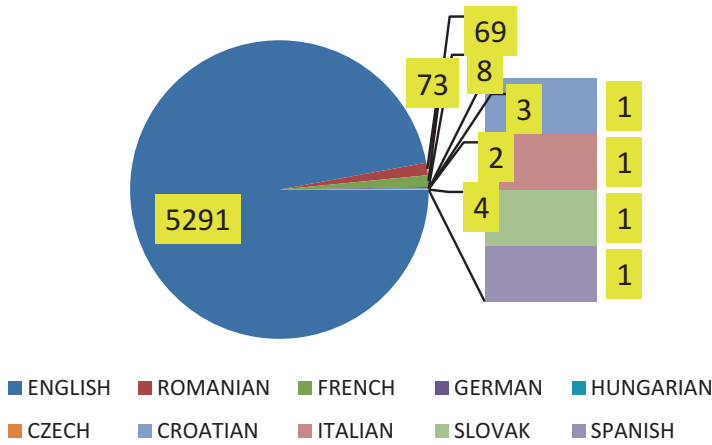
The preference of BBU authors is to use English to publish in prestigious international journals. From the total of ISI-ranked papers published between 2008 and 2013, 97.08% were published in English, 1.03% in Romanian, 1.2% in French, 0.05% in German, 0.03% in Hungarian, and the rest in Czech, Croatian, Slovak, Italian, and Spanish (see Fig. 2).

Starting in 2009 from, a significant number of ISI-ranked articles were produced within the doctoral programs financed through SOPHRD projects and projects that included initiatives dedicated to the development of research competencies, including academic writing skills (see Fig. 3).
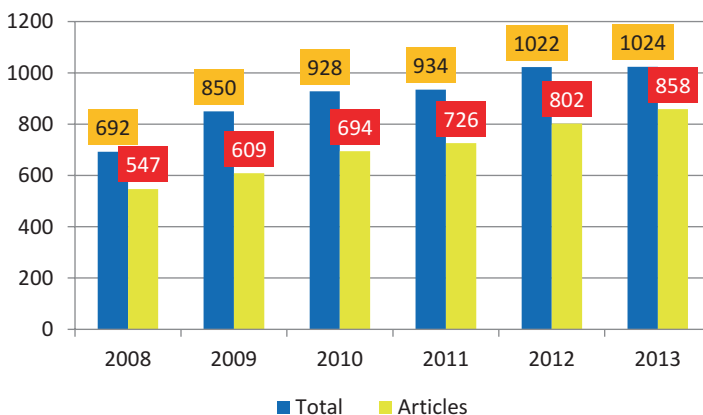

Fig. 1 Number of ISI-ranked papers at Babeş-Bolyai University 2008–2013. (Source: Data computed by BBU's Research Department from Web of Science Core Collection)

Number of ISI papers published in different languages by BBU's affliated authors 2008- 2013

Fig. 2 Number of ISI-ranked papers published in different languages by BBU's affiliated authors 2008–2013. (Source: Data computed by BBU's Research Department from Web of Science Core Collection)

Fig. 3 Number of ISI articles in SOPHRD doctoral and postdoctoral projects at Babeş-Bolyai University 2009–2013. (Source: Data computed by BBU's Research Department from Web of Science Core Collection)
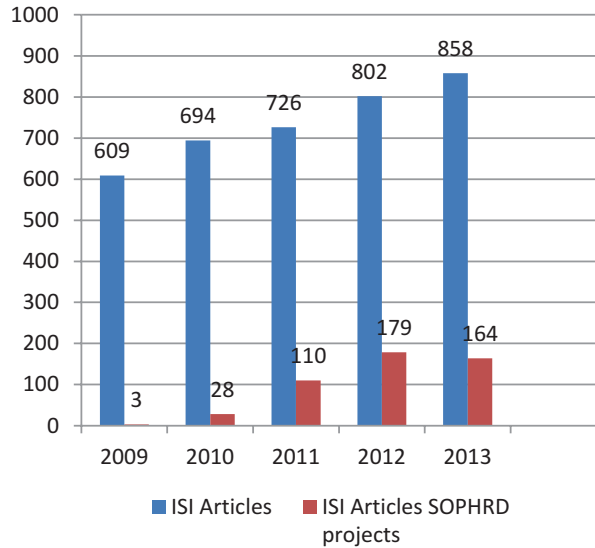
The students that were supported by the doctoral and postdoctoral projects launched in 2008–2009 started to publish by the end of 2009 and more significantly in 2010 and 2011. Thus, an important number of articles published can be considered a direct result of the implementation of doctoral and postdoctoral projects, where publishing was a contractual obligation.

Meanwhile, the increasing publishing activity at the international level was also an outcome of other measures at the institutional level, including the internationalization of teaching and research, competitive research projects' management, and the evaluation of research activity at doctoral, postdoctoral, and teachers' level based on the publishing indicators.

4.3 The Role of Academic Writing Competencies in Fostering a Publishing Culture at Institutional Level

Actors' Voices: Academic management's Perspective

The academic culture of the BBU is characterized by a long-term, already traditional interest in writing and publishing. BBU has several publishing houses, its own bookshop, and several journals in Romanian and other international languages.

Several doctoral programs took into consideration the writing and publishing activity of the candidates during their admission process, and all the doctoral schools of BBU request that doctoral students prove their competency by publishing internationally before the public defense of their thesis. The academic staff is evaluated based on the number of publications that are produced on a one-, two-, or three-year basis, and several measures to encourage publication have been taken over the last 5 years (internal grants for young research teams, prizes for publishing ISI ranked articles, etc.).

The majority of measures at the strategic level have been related to the outcome of the writing process: prizes for articles, evaluation based on published articles, and initiatives to support BBU's journals to become ISI journals, and a few of these have been targeting the process that leads to a published paper, such as internal grants for young researchers, new research teams, and access to international scientific databases. At the beginning of 2008, no specific measures had been taken to improve the quality of the writing process regardless of the support given for completing a specific research project (P. ş. Agachi,[3] personal communication, October 2, 2011).

The measures developed were based on a common understanding at the level of the BBU's management team that academic writing was a process that should be encouraged at the doctoral student and researcher level in order to enhance the quality of the BBU's staff engaged in research and its publications' international visibility.

The first initiative to include specific measures that could increase the quality of writing, especially in English, in a combined training program that also encompassed research management competencies was launched in 2008 in the framework

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[3] Paul şerban Agachi was BBU's vice-rector for research from 2001 to 2008 and the President of the Academic Council from 2008 to 2012.

of the SOPHRD projects. It was a common idea shared by the vice-rector for research (L. Silaghi Dumitrescu,[4] personal communication, August 20, 2008) and the vice-rector for doctoral studies (R. Gräf,[5] personal communication, August 20, 2008) based on their long-standing collaboration and exchange experiences with University of Vienna's Center for Doctoral Studies.

Learning how to write was seen either as the exclusive task of the teacher or as a competency that each student had to somehow acquire during the multiple interactions with the written text produced in the research group or team. This specific representation (P. ş. Agachi, personal communication, July 5, 2014) of the teacher's role in the academic writing process is similar to other evidence of ambivalence regarding, in particular, the teacher's involvement in the academic writing process, as discussed by Lea and Stierer (2000) and Barnett and Di Napoli (2007).

A new tendency is also visible at the institutional level, namely, a shift from the major role of the PhD coordinator towards the inclusion of the PhD students in research teams working on specific projects and teams in which they can learn from different researchers and not only from the PhD coordinator (R. Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

The research training, especially the training regarding writing and publishing, that took place in a formal or informal manner at the level of the research groups and research schools and in several doctoral schools, has been an unwritten tradition at BBU and has been viewed as an important phenomenon in the development of research skills as long as it does not interfere with the basic doctoral program in terms of time or priorities (R. Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

In terms of the evaluation of the best strategy for developing academic writing skills, the preferred interventions (R. Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014; L. Silaghi Dumitrescu, personal communication, July 5, 2014) were:

– A constant program of reading and writing that students themselves should be able to develop and follow (with or without the supervision of their PhD coordinator)
– Feedback from the PhD coordinator on how to write about the same results in a better manner
– Participation in conferences with their own presentations/papers;
– Optional training programs on academic writing and research methodology

The optional character of these additional programs is perceived as important as its contents should also include research methodology for a successful academic writing program. The encouraged approach has been characterized as one in which "we should offer the most and we should not compel at all" (R. Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

With regard to the level at which the training on academic writing should begin, the preference is to start earlier, if possible at the master's level (R., Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014; P. ş. Agachi, personal communication, July 5, 2014; L. Silaghi Dumitrescu, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

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[4] Luminişa Silaghi Dumitrescu was BBU's vice-rector for research from 2008 to 2012.

[5] Rudolf Gräf was BBU's vice-rector for doctoral studies from 2008 until now.

Efforts to publish in international journals are encouraged by the majority of the PhD coordinators as being one of the best instruments to join the international debate as a researcher and to make your own research results visible (L. Silaghi Dumitrescu, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

The language in which the writing process is encouraged, in order to gain international visibility, should not be English as a rule, but rather "the language in which they could best express heir ideas, the language in which they are the best writers" (R. Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014). Even so, a tendency towards publishing in English is very visible even in research domains (research about Southeastern Europe, for example) in which the international English-speaking research community is not very interested (R. Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

Writing and publishing in English is not only an indicator of the institution's visibility at the international level, but it is also an important step in any researcher's career. Publishing in international journals, especially in English-language journals, as a consequence of English becoming the lingua franca of the international research community, makes the researcher more visible worldwide. This process could lead to the extension of the interest in the same topic and could create a sense of belonging to a specific research community (L. Silaghi Dumitrescu, personal communication, July 2, 2014).

Even if there are initiatives at different levels, such as informal initiatives regarding the development of academic writing skills at faculty levels and training modules offered through doctoral scholarship projects, the efficiency of these activities has not been demonstrated (R., Gräf, personal communication, July 5, 2014; L. Silaghi Dumitrescu, personal communication, July 5, 2014). Collecting data regarding specific AW initiatives at the BBU level is the next step to be carried out in demonstrating the role of AW in increasing institutional visibility and its research quality.

Actors' Voices: SOPHRD Doctoral Scholarship Projects' Managers[6]

The SOPHRD projects supporting the development of doctoral studies at the university level were designed following the objectives established in BBU's Strategic Plan (regarding research and developing doctoral competencies) as part of research competencies development (Silaghi Dumitrescu L., Gräf R., Moraru C., Kelemen A., Crişan G., personal communication August 2008, August 2009, August–September 2010, August–September 2011, and August–September 2012). Academic writing modules were included as a tool for developing research competencies.

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[6] The perspectives of the project managers are the results of direct observation and direct participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the above-mentioned projects between 2008 and 2013. The managers of the projects cited were Crişan, G, 2008–2013; Kelemen, A. 2010–2013; Moraru, C., 2008–2011; and Aluaş, M., 2010–2012.

The language chosen for the AW training modules was English, based on data regarding the number of papers published in an international language by BBU staff as well as based on other objectives of the projects, such as the internationalization of doctoral experience (through mobility and cotutelle). The modules, offered on a compulsory basis at the beginning, were offered as optional courses, starting with the second generation of projects.

There have been significant differences in expectations and previously developed research skills at the level of different doctoral schools. Some of the faculties are developing research competencies before the doctoral level, such as at the master's level and even a few of them at the bachelor's level. Doctoral students coming from these schools have already published scientific papers or articles at the master's level[7] (Cramarenco et al. 2015; Aluaș et al. 2017).

The compulsory nature of the training in the doctoral scholarship projects was seen as limitative by the students in the first projects, but, as they appreciated after the completion of courses, they would not have enrolled voluntarily in training not knowing in advance exactly what they were going to study or learn. With the second generation of projects, the students already had a reference point from their colleagues in the second or third year of their doctoral program and had been well informed about training modules; therefore, the participation was optional.

Perceived as interesting modules that were useful for future publishing or as initiating modules in the difficulties of using English as an academic writing language, the AW modules were appreciated by the majority of the participants in courses as being useful; however, the efficacy of AW interventions on writing and publishing was not measured.

Trainers were represented by English and German teachers from the Center for Doctoral Studies who specialized in AW training as well as in research management and research-project management.

Actors' Voices: Partners and Trainers' Perspectives[8]

The structures of the modules proposed by the Center for Doctoral Studies Vienna reflected the structure of AW modules at the University of Vienna (Zinner, personal communication, March 17, 2011).

The participants' level of English was evaluated by our partners/trainers as being medium to good, with participants developing learning objectives to improve language competencies. The attendance rate for the academic writing courses was fairly high, with students becoming more motivated by participating in sessions

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[7] As identified during the enrollment process of several generations of PhD students.

[8] The partners involved in several doctoral trainings were Lucas Zinner, Markus Rheindorf, Birgit Huemmer, Christian Kolowrat, Alisson O'Reilly, and Martin Buxbaum from the Center for Doctoral Studies, University of Vienna. The trainers from BBU were Romana Cramarenco and Rodica Lung.

(Rheindorf, Huemer, Kolowrat, and Buxbaum, personal communication training reports, November 22, 2012).

Interest of the participants was mainly related to their involvement in specific writing tasks or in the completion of specific tasks relevant for their research interests or goals (Cramarenco and Lung, personal communication, July 30, 2009, and September 30, 2010).

The optional character of the training courses led to a better selection of the high achievers and self-motivated students (Cramarenco and Lung, personal communication, July 30, 2009, and September 30, 2010).

The length, duration, and content of the program should have been more adapted to their needs in terms of introducing specific AW modules for writing inside the discipline, a module regarding access to international and relevant literature and publishing criteria, and self-management as a researcher and writer (Moraru, Cramarenco, and Lung, personal communication, September 30, 2010, November 2011, and November 2012).

4.4 Variables and Mechanisms at the Strategic Level Playing a Role in Supporting Academic Writing Initiatives and in Increasing the Visibility of the Scientific Publications of BBU

Based on the analyzed documents and interviews, the process of AW introduction at BBU both historically and as reflected by the relevant actors of the AW initiatives during the last 5 years was supported by a set of variables and mechanisms:

- AW initiatives that contributed to a strategic goal or objective
- Internationalization and increasing interest for institutional visibility that acted as important support mechanisms for writing and publishing in English and that are important determinants in supporting an AW program at the institutional level
- The organizational culture that oriented towards excellence and especially excellence in research as a catalyst for the writing and publishing processes
- Being part of an international research team or of a research group/school is an important mechanism in supporting the development of academic writing skills
- The perspective of the management team is essential in starting long-term initiatives
- An open program that is offered for both master's and PhD students can be attractive for all of them, especially when different types of modules and delivery formats are included
- Insights on the perceived and measured effects of the academic writing program are essential to all the actors involved: management team, trainers, researchers, doctoral students, and teachers.

5 Conclusion and Implications

One of the first conclusions was that developing the academic writing training at BBU was a step-by-step process. Its development has been linked with the defined role of BBU as a research university and with its aim to become a WCU.

The perceived role of academic writing as a core competency in the development of highly skilled researchers varies across the university and the inclusion of academic writing courses at the master's and doctoral levels depends on the professors' view of academic writing as a process.

Academic writing is an instrument that ensures research results' visibility at national and international levels. It is seen as a specific tool that should be acquired by doctoral students early in the doctoral program or should have already been developed as a prerequisite. Three major perspectives have been identified: (a) strong support of specific initiatives in promoting academic writing as a central component in developing competitive researchers; (b) writing as a competency needed by highly qualified researchers, but which nevertheless should first be developed at the level of the research group or research school and second through specific academic writing programs offered at the institutional level; and (c) reluctance to follow any specific approach to developing academic writing skills at the doctoral level outside the curriculum.

Access to training modules on academic writing was an extended initiative that continuously granted interested doctoral students the opportunity to develop their publication skills in English. It was perceived as an opportunity by talented doctoral students that had not published in international journals before.

Developing academic writing skills is a concern for BBU at the doctoral level and not at the undergraduate level, even if specific courses on methodology and how to write a bachelor's or master's thesis are offered at the undergraduate/postgraduate level as part of the curriculum.

Regarding publishing language, there is still a debate about whether to choose English as a writing vehicle in order to gain international visibility and recognition or to use German, Hungarian, or Romanian in order to preserve the specific cultural and scientific identity of the research group or school developed over the years at the institutional level.

Students at the majority of doctoral schools write their doctoral theses in Romanian, but the publication of articles in English, German, or French and less frequently in other languages on their thesis research topic is also encouraged.

Mostly because of its provision of access to international visibility and the world-class university league, academic writing is seen as a variable that can increase the level and quality of publications in English, especially in international journals. Due to that perception, a training program aiming to develop both research skills and academic writing skills is perceived as a better institutional investment than a specific academic writing program.

The academic writing initiatives at BBU were not based on previous research on the evidence-based results and impact of academic writing programs; rather, they started from personal experience, personal values regarding the aim and importance of the writing process in academia, and the best practices of previous international institutional partners in teaching and/or research and were promoted extensively in a top-down manner.

Developing researchers who will aim to test the efficacy and role of the academic writing programs in developing writing and publishing skills is a must for designing a sustainable institutional strategy in the field. Meanwhile, to assure this process development, a long-term critical mass at the level of all the involved actors is needed.

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