مجلة الآداب

للدراسات النفسية والتربوية

صعوبات الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة نجران

د. غيداء علي صالح الزهراني *

gaalzahrani@nu.edu.sa

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تحديات الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية التي يواجهها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة نجران بالمملكة العربية السعودية. ويهدف إلى تحديد الصعوبات المحددة التي تمت مواجهتها، واستكشاف العوامل الأساسية التي تساهم في هذه التحديات، واقتراح استراتيجيات فعالة للتخفيف منها. باستخدام تصميم البحث الوصفي، قامت الدراسة باستطلاع آراء 48 طالبًا من طلاب السنة الرابعة في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال استبيان شامل. تكشف النتائج أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يعانون أكثر من غيرهم مع المفردات والتنظيم وإعادة الصياغة والقواعد والمراجع. وتشمل العوامل الرئيسية التي تؤدي إلى تفاقم هذه التحديات عدم كفاية أساسيات اللغة الإنجليزية، والاعتماد المفرط على اللغة العربية، ومحدودية فرص ممارسة الكتابة، وعدم كفاية المقررات التي تركز على الكتابة. ولمعالجة هذه القضايا، تقترح الدراسة دمج التعليم بأدوات التكنولوجيا المساعدة، وتقديم ردود فعل مستهدفة، وتوسيع المناهج الدراسية التي تعتمد على الكتابة المكثفة. تقدم النتائج رؤى قيمة لمدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية ومصممي المناهج الدراسية، وتزودهم بأدوات لتكييف مناهجهم ودعم طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بشكل أفضل في تطوير كفاءات قوية في الكتابة الأكاديمية. ومن خلال تحديد العقبات المحددة واقتراح الحلول العملية، يساهم هذا البحث في تعزيز جودة تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة نجران وسياقات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مماثلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الأكاديمية، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مهارة الكتابة، صعوبات الكتابة.

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مجلة الآداب
للدراسات النفسية والتربوية

Academic Writing Difficulties of EFL Learners at Najran University

Ghaida Ali S. Alzahrani*

gaalzahrani@nu.edu.sa

Abstract

This study investigates the academic English writing challenges faced by EFL learners at Najran University, Saudi Arabia. It aims to identify the specific difficulties encountered, explore the underlying factors contributing to these challenges, and propose effective strategies to mitigate them. Using a descriptive research design, the study surveyed 48 fourth-year English major students through a comprehensive questionnaire. The findings reveal that EFL learners struggle most with vocabulary, organization, paraphrasing, grammar, and referencing. Key factors exacerbating these challenges include inadequate English language foundation, overreliance on Arabic, limited writing practice opportunities, and insufficient writing-focused courses. To address these issues, the study suggests incorporating technology-aided instruction, providing targeted feedback, and expanding writing-intensive curricula. The results offer valuable insights for English language instructors and curriculum designers, equipping them to tailor their approaches and better support EFL students in developing robust academic writing proficiency. By identifying the specific hurdles and proposing practical solutions, this research contributes to enhancing the quality of English language education at Najran University and similar EFL contexts.

Keywords: Academic writing, EFL learners, writing skill, writing difficulties.

*Associate Professor of Curricula and Methods of Teaching English Language College of Education, Najran University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

Academic writing exhibits distinct characteristics that set it apart from other genres. Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) describe it as "a key aspect of research and education, involving a structured method of expressing ideas. It is commonly used by researchers and educators in scholarly works to present data-driven arguments and logical reasoning" (p. 1). Academic English writing proficiency denotes having the knowledge and skills within the form and function of the written language, which then enables students to engage themselves in whatever form is presented, thereby enabling them to fully demonstrate their content knowledge (Magaba, 2023). Academic writing is formal writing accomplished in an educational setting, such as essays, research proposals, theses, dissertations, or articles (Rastri, et al., 2023). In academic writing, one must handle vast amounts of information, complex ideas, theories, and empirical data with understanding and clarity. This requires not only a deep understanding of the subject but also the ability to simplify complex ideas for the reader. Academic texts must meet high standards of accuracy, evidence, and logical structure. Every statement must be backed by credible evidence (Gupta, et al., 2022). In addition, it emerges as an outcome of a comprehensive array of linguistic proficiencies, encompassing essential grammar competence. A diligent effort to enhance one's academic vocabulary is imperative. Furthermore, the ability to attentively comprehend and assimilate suggestions, while concurrently vocalizing inquiries and articulating personal perspectives, is crucial. Above all, an extensive cultivation of reading prowess is paramount (Sajjad et al., 2021).

Academic writing has a pivotal role in cultivating critical thinking abilities (Sajjad et al., 2021). Engaging in scholarly research exposes individuals to a diverse range of ideas and concepts, necessitating their critical analysis and synthesis within the context of their chosen research topic. This process, characterized as logical thinking, enables individuals to develop the capacity for critically evaluating and interpreting the works and ideas of others over time. Consequently, students are prompted to form opinions on specific concepts, subjects, literature, and artistic creations. By immersing themselves in the subject matter and examining the work of knowledgeable scholars, students gain a comprehensive understanding of their field of study, engaging in in-depth analysis and employing high-order thinking skills. Furthermore, participation in scholarly writing across various disciplines promotes the expansion of vocabulary and mastery of language, while also serving

as a means of social communication, enabling individuals to share their research findings and insights with a wider audience, thus contributing to the advancement of knowledge and their own academic recognition (Sajjad et al., 2021).

Despite its importance, academic writing is fraught with inherent complexities in which are intensified and compounded when students engage in the process using a language that is not their primary language (Sukandi & Rianita, 2021; Asnas, 2022; Rastri et al., 2023; Kareem & Abdulrahman, 2023). Academic writing is one of the most difficult types of formal writing for EFL learners because they must adhere the guidelines of writing correctly. The importance of academic writing at university level is to exhibit students' ability to express their ideas to others and to prove whether the student is someone who is able to think critically or not, but in fact EFL learners have difficulties in this regard (Asnas, 2022). Several research works (Almahameed & Alajalein, 2021; Sajjad et al., 2021; Sukandi & Rianita, 2021; Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Apriyani, 2022; Asnas, 2022; Thuy et al., 2022; Zakiah, 2022; Kareem & Abdulrahman, ; 2023Maghfiroh, 2023; Rastri et al., 2023; Riadil et al., 2023; Ramzan et al., 2023; Ngwenya & Chingwe, 2023; Huyền & Lam, 2024) have been conducted to investigate the writing challenges faced by EFL learners.

Undoubtedly, the obstacles and intricacies encountered by university students in the domain of academic writing are multifaceted, as evidenced by previous scholarly investigations. Almahameed and Alajalein (2021) and Riadil et al. (2023) identified grammatical errors as one of the most prevalent difficulties among students. Ramzan et al. (2023) shed light on various factors that may impede effective academic writing, including coherence deficits between sentences and paragraphs, limited lexical choices, errors in Subject-Verb Agreement and Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, and inconsistencies in punctuation. Similarly, Asnas (2022) discovered that students face challenges in academic writing related to structure, idea development, vocabulary, and grammar. Additionally, Apriyani (2022) found that academic difficulties encompass paraphrasing, adherence to grammatical rules, and limited vocabulary.

Thuy et al. (2022) observed that while most participants possessed a basic understanding of academic vocabulary, they encountered difficulties in selecting appropriate words for their academic writing. This can be attributed to the complex nature of academic words, which are not easily memorized and may not be effectively employed in the intended context. Aldabbus and Almansouri

(2022) arrived at a similar conclusion in their investigation, highlighting the inherent challenges faced by students in selecting suitable academic vocabulary. Furthermore, Huyền and Lam (2024) asserted that students not only practiced writing infrequently but also encountered numerous obstacles in meeting writing criteria, including task achievement, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, coherence, and cohesion.

Moreover, Sajjad et al. (2021) found that students encountered several challenges in academic writing, particularly regarding word choice, vocabulary, and paraphrasing. Additionally, Zakiah's (2022) study revealed that word choice and grammar were the most prevalent issues among students. The study conducted by Riadil, et al. (2023) corroborated these findings, emphasizing the prominence of grammar as the most difficult component of writing for students in this context. Furthermore, although reading and technology had a lesser impact compared to grammar, they were found to contribute to writing challenges.

On the other hand, several research works have been conducted to investigate the challenges of writing faced by EFL learners. Hidayah (2021) examined the factors affecting Indonesian students' writing in procedure text. The results showed that language features were the dominant factors causing writing difficulties. These features included grammatical errors and word choice difficulties. Magaba (2023) articulated the viewpoint that writing in a second language, such as English, involves the utilization of higher-order cognitive skills. Challenges may arise due to the influence of mother-tongue linguistic features, which are deeply ingrained in students' cognitive language skills and may interfere with English writing due to differing linguistic rules. To address these challenges, facilitators must employ pedagogical strategies that encompass diverse teaching and assessment methods, establishing connections between language exercises and other forms of writing to ensure coherence across different aspects of language proficiency.

In addition, Rastri et al. (2023) sought to identify undergraduate students' problems and factors causing the problems in writing a research proposal. Their model utilized three factors causing students' problems in writing a research proposal, namely (1) psychological factors, (2) socio-cultural factors, and (3) linguistic factors. The findings indicated that the score of linguistic factors got the highest, which highly affected students' writing in research proposals. They concluded that each factor causes problems and affects students in writing a research proposal, with linguistic factors

being the most dominant of all factors. Asnas (2022), however, asserted that the factors influencing difficulties in academic writing are experience or practice in academic writing, knowledge of a particular discipline, and English language competence; as such, EFL learners spend a lot of time, patience, and preparation in improving skills in academic writing, which is a challenging process for them. Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022) claimed that practice is a highly recommended way to enhance English writing. For this reason, the lack of academic writing practice opportunities is a major factor of EFL students' problems. Likewise, Kareem and Abdulrahman (2023) posited that the majority of problems the EFL students face during writing research projects is related to a lack of interest in research, experience and practice, good knowledge of research methodology, and positive and effective feedback. The study recommends EFL instructors/supervisors to provide students with feedback and opportunity to practice, guide them avoiding plagiarism, and teach them academic writing. According to Sajjad et al. (2021), teachers attribute these challenges to inadequate writing skills and lack of practice, given that the majority of the study participants considered the time allotted for undergraduate studies to be insufficient.

In order to confront the multitude of challenges that EFL students encountered in academic writing, various strategies have been used. Olsen and Hunnes (2024) discussed the role of formative feedback in teaching academic writing. The majority of the students reported that feedback had helped them accomplish their work, they paid attention to feedback, and that feedback motivated them to do better in their studies. In addition, Prisilia and Rufinus (2024) considered peer tutoring in academic writing to be a kind of peer-assisted teaching-learning strategy that provides the opportunity for students to assist other students to learn writing in a collaborative way. In pairs or groups, students may learn not only academic, but social, behavioural, and functional skills as well. On the other hand, Pratiwi (2024) conducted a study to explain students' perspective of peer feedback in academic writing class. He found that there are two main points obtained, in the form of students who feel helped and those who don't. Some students feel helped because they get a new point of view, motivation and also double check their essay. Other students think it wasn't helpful because they think that the peer is not an expert as the teacher and rather causes confusion.

Emran et al. (2024) conducted a study aimed at investigating the use of paraphrasing ChatGPT answers as a tool to enhance university students' academic writing skills, task focus, language,

353

مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024 | (EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788

accuracy and appropriateness. Participants of the study consisted of two samples divided into two groups, experimental and control. The experimental group used a program of asking and paraphrasing ChatGPT answers for about three months while the control group practiced the ordinary procedures of conventional learning. The program addressed the use of ChatGPT providing paraphrased answers through a course in academic writing skills. It was observed that writing as a productive skill can be supported through external inputs driven by ChatGPT where students were required to show a great regard of synthetic sub-skills and utterances. The two groups were given pre-/post-tests in academic writing skills. Results revealed that the program in paraphrasing ChatGPT contributed to enhancing university students' academic writing skills.

Jusslin and Widlund (2024) recognized workshops as active events to engage writing students and tutors in social and material (quasi-)realities; workshop-ing is an enacted practice, rather than pre-existent or preceding. The study contributes to the existing literature with insights about how different entanglements matter in thesis writing practices and how workshop-ing can become productive in supporting students' thesis writing

According to Riadil, et al. (2023), there are four types of writing: independent writing, guided writing, think aloud, and modelled writing. Independent writing is one of the most common strategies employed by the majority of students to tackle their writing problems. Asnas (2022) highlighted that students overcome their challenges using seven strategies — i.e. brainstorming, reading many articles, using online applications, receiving feedback, writing practice, using the dictionary, editing their work by themselves. To improve their writing skills, EFL students are expected to develop mechanisms to deploy these strategies effectively and have a lot of practice in academic writing, paying attention to four major aspects of writing all at the same time, namely structure, developing ideas, vocabulary, and grammar. On the other hand, English academic writing lecturers can create new strategies to overcome the challenges that students face in academic writing to support teaching and learning effectively in the classroom.

Apriyani (2022) mentioned that students also pointed out their strategies to overcome difficulties. For example, some students preferred to utilize tools to assist in the writing such as Grammarly, Quillbot, and paid to proofread. These tools can help users to paraphrase sentences, correct the grammatical errors, provide many synonyms of words, and correct the writing based on

language structure. Besides, some students also preferred to seek friends' guidance and feedback, because that helped them to get feedback on their writing and boosted their understanding. Students also asked for their advisors' guidance and feedback to help them tackle their difficulties in writing theses. In Setiawan et al.'s (2023), students believe that by implementing strategies such as extensive reading, regular practice, and skill improvement, alongside support from lecturers, students can improve their paraphrasing skills for the better.

Upon conducting an extensive literature review, it became evident that acquiring proficient academic writing skills is a challenge for students worldwide. This issue is not confined to a particular geographic location, as evidenced by studies conducted in various regions including Jordan (Almahameed & Alajalein, 2021), Pakistan (Sajjad et al., 2021; Ramzan et al., 2023), Indonesia (Sukandi and Rianita, 2021; Apriyani, 2022; Asnas, 2022; Zakiah, 2022; Maghfiroh, 2023; Rastri, 2023), Libya (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022), Vietnam (Thuy et al., 2022; Huyền & Lam, 2024), Iraq (Kareem & Abdulrahman, 2023), Thailand (Riadil, et al., 2023), and Rwanda (Ngwenya & Chingwe, 2023). Moreover, it can be argued that a vast majority of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students encounter challenges in multiple dimensions of academic writing. This issue extends even to postgraduate students, as evidenced by the works of Phyo, et al. (2024), Ho (2024), Josua (2024), Yu (2024), and Alamyar (2024). Consequently, it can be deduced that learners across diverse regions of the globe, spanning both undergraduate and postgraduate education levels confront obstacles in academic writing in the English language.

By comprehending the challenges faced by EFL learners in the domain of academic writing, with a particular focus on significant problematic areas and the underlying factors contributing to these difficulties, individuals can adopt proactive measures to enhance the effectiveness of their writing tasks. Additionally, instructors can develop remediation plans, accordingly. Therefore, this research is an endeavour to investigate the academic writing challenges encountered by EFL students at Najran University, and identify fundamental factors that contribute to overcoming these challenges and propose effective strategies to mitigate their impact on students' performance.

355

مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024 | (EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788

Research Questions

The study aims to address the following research inquiries:

1. What difficulties do EFL learners at Najran University encounter in their academic English writing tasks?

2. What factors contribute to the academic English writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners at Najran University?

3. What strategies can be proposed to effectively mitigate EFL learners' academic English writing difficulties?

Research Significance

Academic writing is an essential component of the English language learning process. Investigating the academic writing difficulties faced by EFL students at Najran University would yield valuable insights, enabling the systematic categorization of these difficulties according to their level of complexity. Subsequently, this categorization would facilitate the development of effective strategies within the EFL education system at Najran University to address and mitigate these challenges. By identifying the specific academic writing obstacles and requirements of learners, the outcomes of this study are anticipated to yield substantial benefits for English language instructors and curriculum designers. The findings will equip them with the necessary information to effectively tailor their instructional approaches, ensuring the successful resolution of writing difficulties commonly experienced by English learners. Additionally, the research results will provide English students with a comprehensive understanding of the potential obstacles they may confront, empowering them to navigate these challenges with optimal efficacy.

Statement of the Problem

In the realm of education, the evaluation and assessment processes predominantly hinge upon the written format. Consequently, irrespective of a student's performance in a particular subject, it is commonplace for their grades to suffer if they lack proficiency in writing. The primary objective of this research is to examine the prevalent academic writing challenges encountered by EFL students at Najran University. The researcher's observation of several final-year university EFL students' graduation projects has revealed the existence of diverse difficulties. These obstacles may arise due to factors such as ineffective instructional methods, inadequate allocation of time for teaching writing skills, and potentially insufficient resources.

Methodology

Research Design

The present research employs a descriptive research design to investigate the academic writing challenges encountered by EFL learners at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Najran University, Sharurah, Saudi Arabia.

Participants

The study population comprised all fourth-year English major students enrolled in the compulsory course, "Graduation Project" (coded ENG423-3) at Najran University, Saudi Arabia. The participants were drawn from the English Department, College of Languages and Translation, Sharurah campus, where the researcher works. A total of 48 English major students, aged 21 to 23 years old, who had previously completed four writing courses, participated in the study. Although these students were expected to possess relatively advanced English academic writing skills, observations of their research projects in the current course revealed serious issues in their knowledge of and proficiency in academic writing.

Course Description

The present investigation was carried out during the second term of the academic year 2024. For the purposes of this paper, a course titled "Graduation Project" was selected to provide data, considering that this course symbolises the culmination and demonstration of an undergraduate student's research and writing skills. This course consisted of two distinct components. The initial segment involved equipping students with practical knowledge necessary for their graduation project, encompassing the following subject matters: 1) Introduction to research, including an exploration of the concept of research, different research typologies, and research variables; 2) Examination of key themes in linguistics and language acquisition; 3) Theoretical discourse, encompassing the identification of a research topic and the perusal of a general article; 4) Assisting students in sourcing relevant materials from books and specialized search engines; 5) Note-taking from pertinent sources and constructing outlines; and 6) Familiarization with proper referencing techniques.

The second segment of the course required students to submit a library-based research project by the end of the semester. Students were supposed to select a research topic, devise a research

design, and produce a comprehensive research paper. The research project carried a total weight of 100 marks.

This course is mandatory and is conducted in the final semester. Successful completion of a final year project is a prerequisite for obtaining a bachelor's degree.

Instrument

A thorough review of the relevant literature on teaching EFL, with a particular focus on writing, led to the determination that a questionnaire would be the most suitable data collection tool to obtain the necessary information for this study. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: the first section addressed the writing difficulties encountered by EFL learners, encompassing challenges related to vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, organization, cohesion, coherence, summarizing, paraphrasing, and referencing. The second section focused on the factors contributing to academic English writing difficulties among EFL learners at Najran University; and the third section was meant to elicit potential solutions to effectively mitigate these difficulties. A 3-point Likert scale was utilized for all three sections of the questionnaire, which followed a close-ended format, requiring respondents to select from the provided answer choices.

Validity of the Instrument: The questionnaire designed was shared with other subject matter experts in the field of curriculum and instruction (TEFL) to establish its validity. The comments and suggestions received from the reviewers were incorporated to refine the questionnaire, accordingly.

Reliability of the Instrument: For the purpose of assessing reliability, a preliminary study was conducted with 30 participants. Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, and the resulting value was found to be satisfactory to proceed with the main study, as mentioned in Table 1. After the instrument was finalized, the researcher obtained approval from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee of Najran University. All students who agreed to participate were provided with clear instructions and clarifications on how to complete the questionnaire, which was then distributed electronically. The data collection occurred after the completion of the course to ensure that the learners had acquired the necessary knowledge and experience to provide informed responses to the questionnaire items.

358

(EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788 | مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Questionnaire Areas	Reliability Coefficient
Paraphrasing and summarizing	0.79
Organization, Cohesion, and Coherence	0.97
Vocabulary	0.86
Grammar and Sentence Structure	0.95
Spelling	0.98
Referencing and Citation	0.79
Factors Contributing to Academic English Writing Difficulties among EFL Learners at Najran University	0.95
Suggested Strategies to Overcome EFL Learners' Academic English Writing Difficulties at Najran University	0.99

Findings

The present study aimed to investigate the academic English writing difficulties faced by EFL learners at Najran University. The collected data were organized, categorized, and tabulated to address the research questions. The first research question focused on identifying the specific difficulties encountered by students in various domains of academic English writing. Table 2 presents the results obtained in response to this question.

Table 2

Academic English Writing Difficulties

(1) Paraphrasing and Summarizing					
No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	More difficulties	Rank
I have difficulties					
1	paraphrasing paragraphs with complex sentences.	2.1250	.63998	Moderate	3
2	summarizing ideas within different contexts.	2.1042	.66010	Moderate	5

3	paraphrasing ideas within different contexts.	2.5208	.68384	High	2
4	understanding the original text while paraphrasing paragraphs.	2.1250	.60582	Moderate	4
5	avoiding plagiarism in my writing.	2.8333	.42941	High	1
	Average	2.6458	.44313	High	-

(2)   Organization, Cohesion, and Coherence

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	More difficulties	Rank
I have difficulties					
1	outlining ideas before writing.	2.6250	.60582	High	6
2	writing a solid introduction.	2.6458	.52550	High	4
3	writing an appropriate conclusion.	2.6250	.56962	High	5
4	providing supporting sentences in a paragraph.	2.6667	.55862	High	3
5	using proper connections and transitions to combine sentences in each paragraph.	2.5833	.53924	High	7
6	making paragraphs coherent in a logical sequence.	2.8125	.49060	High	1
7	using proper connections and transitions between the paragraphs.	2.5000	.54578	High	8
8	incorporating quotations into sentences and paragraphs properly.	2.7083	.54415	High	2
	Average	2.6458	.44313	High	-

(3)   Vocabulary

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	More difficulties	Rank
I have difficulties					
1	choosing appropriate words.	2.8958	.30871	High	6
2	comprehending certain words.	2.9583	.201941	High	3
3	finding formal equivalent words for colloquial or conversational expressions.	2.9375	.24462	High	4
4	finding synonyms to some words.	3.0000	.00000	High	1

360

مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024   **ISSN: 2707-5788 (EISSN): 2708-5775**

5	writing adequately due to limited vocabulary.	2.9167	.34723	High	5
6	finding suitable words for specific contexts.	3.0000	.00000	High	1
7	conveying my thoughts clearly due to lack of appropriate vocabulary.	2.8750	.44363	High	7
8	choosing appropriate vocabulary without resorting to translating from Arabic to English.	2.9792	.14434	High	2
	Average	2.9453	.14335	High	-

(4) Grammar and Sentence Structure

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	More difficulties	Rank
I have difficulties					
1	constructing paragraphs with complex sentences.	2.8958	.42474	High	2
2	using the correct verb tense.	2.1250	.63998	Moderate	9
3	using the passive voice.	2.6250	.60582	High	6
4	using the correct word order in a sentence.	2.6458	.52550	High	5
5	inserting appropriate articles (a, an, the) in sentences.	2.1250	.60582	Moderate	10
6	using pronouns correctly.	2.6042	.60983	High	7
7	selecting the correct prepositions.	2.4792	.58308	High	8
8	ensuring subject-verb agreement.	2.7917	.54415	High	3
9	using correct forms for the singular and plural.	2.7500	.56493	High	4
10	constructing grammatically correct sentences.	2.8958	.42474	High	1
	Average	2.5938	.37948	High	-

(5) Spelling

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	More difficulties	Rank
I have difficulties					
1	spelling new words correctly.	1.9792	.48332	Moderate	3
2	spelling complicated words.	2.1042	.42474	Moderate	1
3	spelling words having silent letters.	2.0833	.45351	Moderate	2
	Average	2.0556	.39699	Moderate	-

361

مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024 | (EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788

(6) Punctuation

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	More difficulties	Rank
I have difficulties					
1	placing capitalization where necessary.	1.0208	.14434	Low	6
2	using apostrophes correctly.	1.0208	.14434	Low	5
3	using colons and semicolons properly.	1.0000	.00000	Low	8
4	placing dashes where necessary.	1.0417	.20194	Low	2
5	using exclamation properly.	1.0000	.00000	Low	7
6	using question marks properly.	1.0208	.14434	Low	4
7	using ellipses coherently.	1.0208	.14434	Low	3
8	using parentheses and brackets where necessary.	1.1250	.44363	Low	1
	Average	1.0312	.07062	Low	-
(7) Referencing and Citation					
No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	More difficulties	Rank
I have difficulties					
1	citing others' works in my work.	1.3958	.60983	Low	2
2	incorporating in-text citations.	1.2917	.65097	Low	3
3	applying APA style for in-text citations properly.	2.9375	.31999	High	1
4	compiling a correct reference list using APA style at the end of my writing.	1.1458	.46078	Low	4
	Average	1.6927	.28824	Moderate	-

Note. Weighted average explanation -on a 3-level scale: (1.00-1.66): Low, (1.66-2.33): Moderate, (2.33-3.00): High.

As depicted in Table 2, the students reported lack of vocabulary as the most frequent writing difficulty (M= 2.9453, Std. Deviation= .14335), followed by lack of skills of "paraphrasing and summarizing", and "organization, cohesion, and coherence", which had similar mean and standard deviation (M= 2.6458, Std. Deviation= .44313). Grammar and sentence structure were also identified

as challenging areas (M= 2.5938, Std. Deviation= .37948). Spelling (M= 2.0556, Std. Deviation= .39699) and referencing and citation (M= 1.6927, Std. Deviation= .28824) were moderately difficult, while punctuation was perceived as the least problematic (M= 1.0312, Std. Deviation= .07062). These findings highlight the areas where students face the most prevalent challenges and serve as a basis for further exploration.

Further analysis was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties within each domain. Regarding vocabulary, the results indicated that students struggled with finding suitable words for specific contexts and lacked synonyms for certain words. In the domain of paraphrasing and summarizing, the findings revealed that avoiding plagiarism was particularly challenging for students. In terms of organization, cohesion and coherence, students faced difficulties in making paragraphs coherent and maintaining a logical sequence of ideas. The area of grammar and sentence structure presented challenges in constructing grammatically correct sentences and composing paragraphs with complex sentence structures. Regarding referencing and citation, compiling a correct reference list using APA style was not considered challenging, but applying APA style for in-text citations proved to be the most difficult. Punctuation, on the other hand, was generally not an area of concern for the students.

Moving on to the second research question, which aimed to identify the factors contributing to the academic English writing difficulties experienced by EFL learners at Najran University, the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Factors Influencing Academic English Writing Difficulties

No.	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Response	Rank
1	Not enough writing courses are available at Najran University.	2.7500	.52592	Agree	5
2	Limited opportunities to practice academic writing.	2.8125	.49060	Agree	3
3	Lack of reading materials.	1.1667	.51914	Disagree	12
4	Insufficient writing resources like books,	1.1667	.55862	Disagree	11

363

مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024 | (EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788

articles, and online materials.

5	Dictionaries are not used enough.	1.0000	.00000	Disagree	14
6	Lack of student motivation.	2.0417	.68287	Neutral	7
7	Students rely too much on Arabic translation to generate ideas, resulting in writing deficiencies.	2.7708	.59213	Agree	4
8	Instructors have limited proficiency in academic English writing.	1.1667	.47639	Disagree	13
9	Instructors prescribe irrelevant writing tasks and assignments that do not effectively cultivate students' writing practice.	1.2292	.55504	Disagree	10
10	Instructors use inappropriate teaching methods for academic English writing.	2.1667	.80776	Neutral	6
11	Instructors use the Arabic language while teaching English classes.	2.8750	.39275	Agree	2
12	Lack of effective feedback from instructors on student writing.	1.7500	.72932	Neutral	8
13	Lack of precise assessment methods and grading criteria.	1.6250	.78889	Disagree	9
14	Inadequate foundation due to insufficient preparation in secondary school and a lack of formal training in academic writing.	2.8958	.42474	Agree	1
	Average	1.9583	.19759	Neutral	-

Weighted average explanation -on a 3-level scale: (1.00-1.66): Disagree, (1.66-2.33): Neutral, (2.33-3.00): Agree.

Table 3 reflects the students' responses regarding the factors influencing their academic English writing skills. The majority of respondents identified inadequate foundation due to insufficient preparation in secondary school and a lack of formal training in academic writing as the primary factor contributing to their difficulties (M= 2.8958, Std. Deviation= .42474). The use of Arabic

language by instructors during English classes was also indicated as a significant factor (M= 2.8750, Std. Deviation= .39275). Limited opportunities to practice academic writing (M= 2.8125, Std. Deviation= .49060), overreliance on Arabic translation for generating ideas (M= 2.7708, Std. Deviation= .59213), and the lack of writing courses at Najran University (M= 2.7500, Std. Deviation= .52592) were also reported to have an impact on students' writing proficiency.

In the third section of the questionnaire, students were asked to provide strategies they believed would help overcome their academic writing difficulties. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Suggested Strategies to Overcome EFL Learners' Academic English Writing Difficulties at Najran University
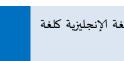
No.	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Importance	Rank
1	Provision of more writing courses to address the current lack of academic English writing proficiency.	2.6667	.47639	High important	9
2	Teaching academic writing in a comprehensive step-by-step manner to ensure understanding among all students.	2.5208	.68384	High important	11
3	Allocating enough time for in-class academic writing activities.	2.7292	.57388	High important	7
4	Increasing the frequency of academic writing assignments.	2.7292	.53553	High important	6
5	Making academic writing class more of a practical nature.	2.6667	.51914	High important	8
6	Using individualized tasks in academic writing to identify and address specific weaknesses and strengths of each student.	2.6458	.60105	High important	10
7	Organizing mini-group discussions to promote peer assistance and collaboration among students.	2.4583	.74258	High important	14
8	Providing training programs for university instructors to enhance their ability to improve students' academic writing skills.	2.4375	.61562	High important	15
9	Utilizing various teaching techniques to enhance the	2.4583	.61742	High important	13

	effectiveness of academic writing instruction.				
10	Utilizing various technology tools to enhance the effectiveness of academic writing instruction.	2.9375	.31999	High important	1
11	Combining peer reviews with teachers' corrections to give valuable feedback to students.	2.7917	.50353	High important	5
12	Conducting diagnostic assessments to identify specific writing problems of students.	2.7917	.45934	High important	4
13	Encouraging frequent use of dictionaries to improve students' language proficiency and accuracy.	2.4583	.61742	High important	12
14	Providing corrective feedback in class after grading assignments to highlight students' strengths and weaknesses.	2.7917	.54415	High important	3
15	Incorporating questions as part of feedback can prompt students to develop self-awareness of their errors in academic writing.	2.9167	.27931	High important	2
	Average	2.6666	.3368608	High important	-

Weighted average explanation -on a 3-level scale: (1.00-1.66): Low, (1.66-2.33): Moderate, (2.33-3.00): High.

The third focal point of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the strategies or approaches perceived by students as beneficial for their learning and performance in academic writing (see Table 4). According to the students' viewpoint, the utilization of diverse technological tools to augment the effectiveness of academic writing instruction emerged as the most helpful strategy, with a mean score of 2.9375 and a standard deviation of .31999. Furthermore, all the other aspects received high scores in terms of importance. These aspects, ranked in a descending order, including: incorporating questions as part of feedback to prompt students' self-awareness of their errors in academic writing (M= 2.9167, Std. Deviation= .27931), providing corrective feedback in class after grading assignments to emphasize students' strengths and weaknesses (M= 2.7917, Std. Deviation= .54415), conducting diagnostic assessments to identify specific writing problems among students (M= 2.7917, Std. Deviation= .45934), combining peer reviews with teachers' corrections to offer valuable feedback to students (M= 2.7917, Std. Deviation= .50353), increasing the frequency of academic writing assignments (M= 2.7292, Std. Deviation= .53553), allocating sufficient time for in-class academic

366

(EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788 | مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024

writing activities (M= 2.7292, Std. Deviation= .57388), making the academic writing class towards a more practical nature (M= 2.6667, Std. Deviation= .51914), Provision of more writing courses to address the current lack of academic English writing proficiency (M= 2.6667, Std. Deviation= .47639), using individualized tasks in academic writing to identify and address specific weaknesses and strengths of each student (M= 2.6458, Std. Deviation= .60105), teaching academic writing in a comprehensive step-by-step manner to ensure understanding among all students (M=2.5208, Std. Deviation= .68384), encouraging frequent use of dictionaries to improve students' language proficiency and accuracy (M= 2.4583, Std. Deviation=.61742), utilizing various teaching techniques to enhance the effectiveness of academic writing instruction (M= 2.4583, Std. Deviation= .61742), organizing mini-group discussions to promote peer assistance and collaboration among students (M= 2.4583, Std. Deviation= .74258), and providing training programs for university instructors to enhance their ability to improve students' academic writing skills (M= 2.4375, Std. Deviation= .61562).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aims to explore the challenges encountered by EFL students at Najran University in academic writing. The research sample comprises 48 final-year female students who agreed to participate. The questionnaire utilized in this research focuses on three main areas: the difficulties faced by the students, the factors influencing their academic English writing skills, and the strategies they consider effective in overcoming challenges in English academic writing. Analysis of the questionnaire responses reveals that EFL students at Najran University face a multitude of challenges in academic writing, with vocabulary deficiencies emerging as particularly formidable. This finding resonates with prior research conducted by Sajjad et al. (2021), Asnas (2022), Apriyani (2022), Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022), and Zakiah (2022) in various contexts.

Regarding the factors contributing to these challenges, the data indicates that inadequate foundation caused by insufficient preparation in secondary school and a lack of formal training in academic writing hold prominent positions. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022), Asnas (2022), and Sajjad et al. (2021), who identified insufficient experience or practice in academic writing as a primary influential factor in academic writing difficulties.

Additionally, the students identified several other factors believed to contribute to these challenges, including instructors' use of the Arabic language during English classes, limited opportunities to practice academic writing, overreliance on Arabic translation leading to writing deficiencies, and the lack of an adequate number of writing courses during BA study at Najran University.

Furthermore, the students expressed their confidence in adopting multiple approaches to enhance their academic writing proficiency. These include leveraging various technology tools to augment the effectiveness of academic writing instruction, integrating questioning techniques into feedback to promote self-awareness of writing errors, and providing corrective feedback in class after grading assignments to highlight students' strengths and weaknesses.

The findings of this study have implications for the teaching of academic writing. In particular, the identified vocabulary difficulties highlight the need for addressing inadequate foundations resulting from insufficient preparation in secondary school. A long-term solution could involve introducing academic writing instruction at the secondary school level, engaging students in writing tasks that foster analysis, synthesis, research, and critical thinking, thus establishing a solid foundation for university-level assignments. Additionally, it is recommended that the College of Languages and Translation (Sharurah) assess students' language competency upon university admission, as candidates' academic literacy is not tested prior to admission into the English Language programme. Achieving a certain score in IELTS (International English Language Testing System), STEP (Standardized Test for English Proficiency) or TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is not a requirement for admission.

Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that the findings be utilized to enhance current teaching methods employed in academic writing classes by English language instructors. Adequate teaching aids and modern equipment should be provided in classroom to motivate students to use English actively with their teachers. Furthermore, English faculty members should adopt modern teaching techniques. To enrich vocabulary, learners should allocate time according to their individual limitations and refer to reputable English-to-English dictionaries to understand the meanings of unfamiliar and challenging words. Additionally, maintaining notetaking as a habit to record the usage of new words can be beneficial.

368

(EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788 | مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024

The findings also indicate insufficiency in the number of English language courses offered by the department and limited opportunities for writing practice in the classrooms. It is strongly recommended to increase the number of language courses to strengthen overall language skills, particularly in writing. Teachers should provide students with ample opportunities to engage in academic writing practice.

It is noteworthy avoiding plagiarism in academic writing was identified by the students as an area of high difficulty. Appropriate use of sources without committing plagiarism is a critical issue that second language learners must be aware of. Instructors should guide students to avoid plagiarism and use references accurately. Merely highlighting the seriousness of this topic is insufficient; instead, ample examples should be provided to ensure students possess the necessary knowledge of paraphrasing, using quotations, and accurately writing citations and reference lists.

The results of this study represent a preliminary step towards addressing academic writing issues. However, it is advisable to include participants from different universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and consider additional variables such as work experience during admission. Although all students enrolled in the program were included in this study, the sample is limited to one higher education institution, and students at other institutions may report different challenges. Obtaining a holistic understanding of the challenges of writing in English and how to improve students' proficiency in this skill would necessitate broadening the scope of investigation. Such an understanding would provide an evidence-based foundation for better preparing current university-level students and reevaluating secondary-level education curricula regarding writing skills. Additionally, it is worth noting that the questionnaire was administered to female students only. Conducting future studies with both male and female students would allow for an examination of gender differences in academic writing difficulties. While this study provides a snapshot of current academic writing difficulties, it is important to acknowledge that these challenges may evolve over time and with experience. The timing of the questionnaire administration at the end of the previous semester, after students had enrolled in various courses and gained exposure to academic writing in different subjects, was considered appropriate. Furthermore, future research on this topic could employ the triangulation method for data collection to obtain more valid and in-depth insights.

369

مجلة الآداب للدراسات النفسية والتربوية، كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، المجلد6، العدد3، سبتمبر 2024 | (EISSN): 2708-5775 ISSN: 2707-5788

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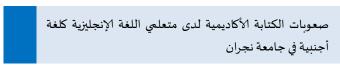
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372

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