مجلـــة كليـــة التربيـــة طرابلـــس

Journal of the Faculty of Education Tripoli

تعزيز مهارات الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى طلاب الماجستير الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كلية اللغات بجامعة طرابلس: التحديات والحلول

Zuhour Mohammed Aldawik

Ibtisam Ibrahim Dredi

Department of English, University of Tripoli, Libya

ibtisamdredi@gmail.com

z.duik@uot.edu.ly

Article history

Received: Month Oct, 2025 Accepted: Month Nov, 2025

الملخص

يواجه العديد من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية -كلغة أجنبية - تحديات في تطوير مهارات الكتابة الأكاديمية، وتُحدد هذه الدراسة هذه التحديات لدى طلاب الماجستير في كلية اللغات بجامعة طرابلس، وتقترح استراتيجيات لتحسينها باستخدام تصميم مختلط الأساليب، وقد شملت عينة من 51 طالب ماجستير، وجُمعت البيانات من خلال استبيانات ومقابلات، وأشارت النتائج إلى وجود صعوبات في الحفاظ على الصياغة الرسمية، وتطوير المفردات، وضمان الترابط، وصياغة عبارات الأطروحة، والتلخيص، وتطبيق التفكير النقدي، وإعادة الصياغة. واقترح المشاركون تعزيز هذه المهارات من خلال زيادة القراءة، وممارسة الكتابة بانتظام، وتقديم التغذية الراجعة البناءة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الأكاديمية، التحديات، الحلول، طلبة الماجستير

Enhancing Academic Writing Skills among EFL MA Students at the Faculty of Languages, University of Tripoli: Challenges and Solutions

Abstract:

Many EFL students face challenges in developing academic writing skills. This study identifies these challenges among Master's degree students at the Faculty of Languages, and proposes strategies for improvement. Using a mixed-methods design with a sample of 51 MA students, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Findings indicate difficulties in maintaining formality, developing vocabulary, ensuring coherence, crafting thesis statements, summarizing, applying critical thinking, and paraphrasing. Participants suggested enhancing skills through increased reading, regular writing practice, and constructive feedback.

Keywords: Academic writing, challenges, solutions, MA students

Introduction

Academic writing is a fundamental skill that is essential for postgraduate students across various disciplines. It involves the ability to communicate complex ideas, analyze and synthesize information, and present research findings in a clear, concise, and well-structured manner (Singh & Lukkarila, 2017). Proficiency in academic writing is crucial for success in postgraduate studies, as it enables students to effectively convey their knowledge, engage in scholarly discourse, and contribute to the advancement of their field.

However, developing these skills can be challenging for students studying in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

Academic writing plays an essential role in the academic life of students, instructors, and researchers. Fang (2021) highlights that academic writing is crucial across disciplines, serving as a means to produce, codify, transmit, evaluate, teach, and learn knowledge and ideology. The ability to write academically is fundamental to disciplinary learning and vital for academic success. It is essential for researchers, students, and academics to master academic writing skills to effectively communicate their ideas and findings within the scholarly community. Proficient academic writing skills are key for students to convey their ideas, demonstrate critical thinking abilities, and contribute to their respective fields of study (Sajjad et al., 2021).

However, despite its importance, many academics have expressed significant concerns about students' poor academic writing performance (Melville, 2020). Writing is one of the most challenging skills for EFL students, as it encompasses various language elements, including sentence structure, punctuation, and grammar (Maiyoritsa & Wahyuni, 2021). This complexity is further exacerbated for students studying in a foreign language. According to Budjalemba & Listyani (2020), EFL students often face a range of challenges, particularly in academic writing. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students specializing in English education, academic writing presents the greatest challenge due to its complex nature, which can lead to difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, and the development of ideas (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). This is further highlighted by Ben Aissa (2018), who argues that EFL learners encounter greater difficulties in academic writing compared to native English speakers, as they must navigate the intricacies of a language that is not their own.

Moreover, Umamah et al. (2019, as cited in Asnas, 2022) highlight that the structural and cultural differences between EFL students' native languages and English contribute significantly to their writing challenges. These disparities often lead to difficulties in generating writing ideas, as well as issues with grammar and sentence structure. Furthermore, Akhtar et al. (2019) emphasize that insufficient practice in academic writing is a fundamental reason for negative attitudes and difficulties in this area. Consequently, for EFL students, the demands of academic writing in a foreign language can create substantial barriers to their success in postgraduate studies. They must navigate not only the complexities of understanding academic content but also the adherence to various conventions, structures, and linguistic requirements essential for effective academic writing. This challenge can further hinder their confidence and ability to succeed in their studies.

The challenges of academic writing are often multifaceted and stem from various factors, including language barriers, a limited understanding of academic conventions, inadequate writing skills, and difficulties in organizing and expressing ideas coherently (AlMarwani, 2020). AlMarwani argues that EFL students find it hard to achieve the expected writing standards and to exhibit critical thinking skills. Furthermore, these students often struggle with organizing their thoughts and information on their chosen topics, as well as summarizing existing materials (Al-Badi, 2015).

Accordingly, the main concern of this research is to improve the academic writing skills of EFL MA students at the Faculty of Languages by identifying the main challenges that students encounter when writing academic papers. Moreover, suggesting potential solutions and exploring effective strategies is a fundamental goal to deal with academic writing challenges.

Aims of the research

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the primary challenges that EFL MA students face when writing academically.
2. To propose effective strategies to enhance the academic writing skills among MA students.

Research Questions

To fulfill the objectives of this research, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What are the primary challenges that EFL MA students face when writing academically?
2. What strategies do EFL MA students perceive as effective for enhancing their academic writing skills?

Previous Studies

Effective academic writing is essential for success in higher education, yet many students face challenges that impede their ability to communicate their ideas clearly (Sajjad et al., 2021). By examining a wide range of scholarly works, this review identifies common obstacles that students face when writing for academic purposes. Furthermore, it explores the strategies and interventions suggested by researchers to address these challenges and enhance students' academic writing abilities.

Academic Writing Challenges

The most important indicator of success in MA programs is academic writing proficiency (AlMarwani, 2020). Nevertheless, according to previous studies, many students and early career researchers face hurdles in understanding and writing academic and disciplinary texts. For example, Almatarneh et al. (2018) explored the academic writing problems encountered by Jordanian postgraduate students at a Malaysian university. Using a case study approach, the study revealed several challenges, including a lack of academic vocabulary, difficulties in expressing ideas, and issues with organizing sentences and composing paragraphs. Common problems also included paraphrasing, building critical

discussions, erroneous grammar and spelling, weak referencing, and difficulty in finding resources for literature reviews.

Similarly, Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022) investigated the difficulties faced by Libyan EFL university students in academic writing. Their study, involving 36 students from the Faculty of Education at the University of Benghazi, identified challenges such as selecting appropriate academic vocabulary, formulating thesis statements, and writing coherent paragraphs. A related study by Aiblu and Madanu (2023) explored the writing issues encountered by Libyan students at Misurata University, revealing common errors like grammatical mistakes, punctuation problems, poor organization, and illogical sequence. Both studies underscore the significant writing challenges faced by Libyan EFL students, highlighting the need for targeted pedagogical interventions.

In another study, Sajjad et al. (2021) examined the academic writing challenges faced by university students and found that the most significant difficulties were related to vocabulary choice and paraphrasing. Additionally, Mustafa et al. (2022) noted that students often face limited vocabulary, a narrow range of grammatical structures, difficulties in comprehending reading texts, and challenges in summarizing and paraphrasing. Al-Shredi (2024) further contributed to this discourse by identifying specific challenges in paraphrasing among Libyan EFL MA students, revealing three main difficulties: unfamiliarity with vocabulary, deficient reading comprehension skills, and a tendency to alter the main ideas of original texts.

Moreover, Al-Mukdad (2019) focused on the challenges faced by Arab international university students in English academic writing. This quantitative study involved 50 participants from various fields at Arab International University (AIU), who completed surveys. The findings revealed a limited understanding of the distinctions between general English and academic English which attributed to a lack of prior exposure to academic writing.

Another study by Alharbi (2017) investigated the difficulties in English academic writing as perceived by Saudi postgraduate students and their English supervisors. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research identified several key challenges,

including insufficient academic vocabulary, avoiding plagiarism, using cohesive devices effectively, constructing logical arguments, and demonstrating critical thinking in writing.

Overall, the examination of previous studies reveals a significant focus on the challenges faced by EFL students in academic writing, particularly issues related to vocabulary, structuring arguments, and paraphrasing. However, there is a notable gap in research specifically addressing the experiences of EFL MA students at the Faculty of Languages, University of Tripoli. Most studies center on undergraduate populations or different regional contexts, leading to a lack of understanding of the unique challenges and needs of postgraduate students in Libya. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing targeted interventions that can enhance academic writing skills among EFL MA students.

Proposed Solutions

Graham & Harris (2016, p. 359) noted that "good writing is not a gift. It is forged by desire, practice, and assistance from others. You can play a central role in this development by teaching writing effectively." A series of recent studies proposed various solutions and effective strategies to enhance academic writing skills among students.

For instance, AlMarwani (2020) investigated potential solutions for postgraduate students at Taibah University, Saudi Arabia. Data was collected using in-depth semi-structured focus group interviews. The results showed that using connected technology, such as Google Classroom with interactive and collaborative features, can enhance students' academic writing skills. However, this study revealed that such strategies do not guarantee improvement in academic writing for postgraduate students. Therefore, AlMarwani suggested that instructors must intervene and provide constructive and scaffolded feedback to their students.

Similarly, Alharbi (2017) explored strategies for Saudi students to overcome academic writing difficulties. Participants in the study suggested several remedies, including consulting exemplary academic papers to alleviate writing stress and understand fundamental writing principles. The study revealed that frequent practice in writing and reading is essential for students to learn paragraph structure, organize their ideas, construct logical arguments, and improve their familiarity with academic language and vocabulary.

Another study on academic writing was conducted by Arif et al. (2020) at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University. The study proposed strategies to assist students in addressing academic writing challenges. These strategies include employing straightforward vocabulary, utilizing mind mapping techniques, and using concise sentences. Additionally, the study recommended that students engage in critical reading and receive regular feedback from teachers, as an effective means of overcoming academic writing difficulties.

A study carried out by Khazaal (2019) aimed to identify the effect of using the summarizing strategy on postgraduate learners. A two-month implementation was conducted with twenty Iraqi postgraduate learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL). The results revealed that the utilization of the summarizing strategy significantly impacts the academic writing skills of postgraduate students. Therefore, the study recommended incorporating this strategy into the curriculum of educational institutions, including schools and universities.

The studies reviewed highlighted various strategies to improve academic writing skills among students. Key factors included structured guidance, regular practice, and diverse strategies. Insights from Linuwih (2021) emphasized the benefits of extensive reading, while Alharbi (2017) highlighted the value of consulting exemplary works. Khazaal (2019) discussed summarization techniques, and AlMarwani (2020) and Arif et al. (2020) stressed the importance of technology and constructive feedback. By investigating new strategies and refining existing ones, educators and researchers can enhance support for students, contributing to their overall academic success.

Research Methodology

Participants

This research involved 51 Libyan EFL MA students. For the questionnaire, 42 students are recruited. There were 39 females and 3 males, ranging in age from 26 to 31 years. In the qualitative interview phase, 9 MA students are interviewed. The students are all studying in the Department of English of the Faculty of Languages at the University of Tripoli.

Instruments

This research utilizes two instruments to gather data: a questionnaire and a semi structured interview. The questionnaire is designed and developed by the researcher following a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. The items included in the questionnaire are adapted from established studies, specifically those by Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022), and Mutimani (2016). The questionnaire, which is disseminated using Google Form, consisted of three separate sections. The first section aims to collect demographic information about participants, such as their gender and age. The second section focuses on identifying the specific challenges facing students in academic writing. This section consists of a series of nineteen items assesses the difficulty of various academic writing skills. Respondents are asked to indicate how challenging they find each skill on a Likert scale, which included options from "Not challenging at all" to "Extremely challenging". The final section of the questionnaire explores potential solutions for enhancing academic writing skills among students. Participants are presented with eight strategies designed to improve writing proficiency. Respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement with each strategy using a scale ranging from "Not Useful at all" to "Very Useful".

In this research, also semi-structured interviews are used to gather qualitative insights into the challenges facing MA students in academic writing and the strategies to enhance their skills. It consists of six questions designed to explore participants' experiences and perspectives in depth.

Analysis and Results

The Analysis Academic Writing Challenges Facing MA Students

Table (1) presents the descriptive statistics for the academic writing challenges facing students from item 1 to 5. The abbreviations used in the following tables are; (N.C) for not challenging at all, (S.C) for slightly challenging, (V.C) for very challenging, (E.C) for extremely challenging, (F) for frequency and (S.D) for standard deviation.

Table 1: Results of academic writing challenges facing students from item 1 to 5

No	Item		N.C	S.C	V.C	E.C	Mean	S.D
1	Understanding the requirements and expectations of academic writing assignments.	F	2	26	10	4	2.38	0.74
		%	5.3	61.9	23.8	9.0		
2	Developing strong thesis statement and argument.	F	2	6	21	13	2.73	0.81
		%	4.8	14.3	50.0	31.0		
3	Structuring and organizing your academic papers.	F	7	20	13	2	2.42	0.84
		%	16.7	47.6	31.0	4.8		
4	Constructing well-organized paragraphs.	F	6	16	18	2	2.46	0.83
		%	14.3	38.1	42.9	4.8		
5	Maintaining cohesion and coherence throughout your academic assignments.	F	1	13	20	8	2.79	0.69
		%	2.4	31.0	47.6	19.0		

The analysis of academic writing challenges based on 42 student responses highlights several key issues. For understanding assignment requirements, only 5.3% found it not challenging, while 61.9% rated it as slightly challenging, resulting in a mean score of 2.38 (SD = 0.74), indicating widespread difficulty that may impact performance. In developing thesis statements and arguments, the mean score is 2.73 (SD = 0.81), with 81% facing various levels of difficulty, suggesting a need for more guidance. Structuring papers scores a mean of 2.42 (SD = 0.84), where 35.8% report significant challenges, emphasizing the need for better organizational instruction. The mean score for constructing paragraphs is 2.46 (SD = 0.83), with 24% of students finding it very or extremely challenging. Lastly, maintaining cohesion and coherence has a mean score of 2.79 (SD = 0.69), with 66.6% of students struggling with logical flow. Overall, these findings highlight the need for improved instruction in multiple aspects of academic writing.

Table 2: Results of academic writing challenges facing students from item 6 to 10

No	Items		NC	SC	VC	EC	Mean	S.D
6	Constructing grammatical correct sentences.	F	23	4	14	1	1.67	0.59
		%	54.8	9.5	33.3	2.4		
7	Using formal, academic tone and vocabulary	F	6	13	13	9	2.55	0.84
		%	14.6	31.7	31.7	22.0		
8	Using transitions and coherence devices	F	5	11	24	2	2.55	0.76
		%	11.9	26.2	57.1	4.8		
9	Using appropriate punctuation marks.	F	14	20	5	3	2.31	0.73
		%	33.3	47.6	11.9	7.1		
10	Using proper capitalization guidelines.	F	29	10	3	0	1.38	0.49
		%	69.0	23.8	7.1	0.0		

For "Constructing grammatically correct sentences," the mean score is 1.67 (SD = 0.59), with 54.8% finding it not challenging, while 33.3% face significant difficulties, indicating mixed confidence in grammar. In "Using a formal academic tone and vocabulary," the mean score is 2.55 (SD = 0.84), where 14.6% find it easy, but 31.7% rate it as very challenging, suggesting issues with formal tone that may impact communication. Similarly, "Using transitions and coherence devices" scores a mean of 2.55 (SD = 0.76), with 57.1% of students considering it very challenging, highlighting struggles with writing flow. For "Using appropriate punctuation marks," the mean score is 2.31 (SD = 0.73), indicating that while many have a basic understanding, 47.6% still experience challenges. Finally, "Using proper capitalization guidelines" has a mean score of 1.38 (SD = 0.49), with 69% reporting no difficulties, reflecting effective prior instruction.

Table 3: Results of academic writing challenges facing students from item 11 to 15

No	Items		N.C	S.C	V.C	E.C	Mean	S.D
11	Locating relevant and credible sources to support your arguments and claims.	F	6	22	10	4	2.24	0.74
		%	14.3	51.9	23.8	10.0		
12	Summarizing key points from research literature to incorporate into your academic writing.	F	2	13	21	6	2.55	0.76
		%	4.8	31.0	50.0	14.3		
13	Synthesizing and integrating information from the multiple related sources.	F	7	17	16	6	2.54	0.78
		%	16.7	41.0	37.6	4.8		
14	Formatting in-text citations and reference lists according to the required citation style (e.g. APA, MLA).	F	19	14	8	1	1.88	0.65
		%	44.8	33.3	19.5	2.4		
15	Applying critical thinking skills.	F	6	9	17	9	2.55	0.82
		%	14.6	21.7	41.7	22.0		

For "locating relevant and credible sources," the mean score is 2.24 (SD = 0.74), with 14.3% finding it not challenging, while 51.9% rate it as slightly challenging, and 33.8% face varying degrees of difficulty. Item 12, "summarizing key points from research literature," has a mean score of 2.55 (SD = 0.76), with 50% finding it very challenging and 14.3% indicating extreme difficulty, suggesting struggles in distilling essential information. In Item 13, "synthesizing information from multiple sources," the mean score is 2.54 (SD = 0.78), with 41% finding it slightly challenging and 37.6% reporting significant difficulties. For "formatting citations," the mean score is 1.88 (SD = 0.65), with 44.8% feeling comfortable, yet 22% still face challenges. Finally, "applying critical thinking skills" has a mean score of 2.55 (SD = 0.82), with 41.7% finding it very challenging, indicating a need for improved instructional support in this area.

Table 4: Results of academic writing challenges facing students from item 16 to 19

No	Items		N.C	S.C	V.C	E.C	Mean	S.D
16	Paraphrasing information from various sources while maintaining originality in your academic papers.	F	10	16	13	3	2.39	0.77
		%	23.3	37.6	31.9	7.2		
17	Avoiding plagiarism when citing and paraphrasing information.	F	29	10	3	0	1.38	0.49
		%	69.0	23.8	7.1	0.0		
18	Managing the overall writing process (planning, drafting, and revising).	F	8	14	16	4	2.10	0.64
		%	19.0	32.9	38.1	10.0		
19	Efficiently planning and managing time to meet deadlines.	F	12	6	19	5	2.38	0.78
		%	28.6	14.3	45.2	11.9		

For Item 16, which focuses on "paraphrasing information from multiple sources while ensuring originality," the mean score is 2.39 (SD = 0.77). While 23.3% find it not challenging, 37.6% consider it slightly challenging, and 31.9% view it as very challenging, indicating that over half struggle with this task. In Item 17, addressing "avoiding plagiarism," the mean score is 1.38 (SD = 0.49), with 69% feeling confident and finding it not challenging, reflecting a strong grasp of ethical writing practices. Item 18, which covers "managing the overall writing process," has a mean score of 2.10 (SD = 0.64); 38.1% find it very challenging, suggesting significant difficulties in planning, drafting, and revising. Finally, Item 19 focuses on "planning and managing time to meet deadlines," yielding a mean score of 2.38 (SD = 0.78), with 45.2% reporting this as very challenging, indicating widespread struggles with time management.

The Analysis of the Potential Solutions to Enhance Students' Academic Writing Skill

MA students are surveyed on their agreement with strategies to enhance academic writing skills, including explicit instruction, peer review, individualized feedback, and workshops. Students rated these strategies from "Not Useful at All" to "Very Useful." Abbreviations used include (N.U) for not useful, (S.U) for somewhat useful, (U) for useful, (V.U) for very useful, (F) for frequency, and (S.D) for standard deviation. The following table (5) presents the descriptive statistics for these strategies.

Table 5: Results of Potential Solutions to Enhance Students' Academic Writing Skill

No	Items		N.U	S.U	U	V.U	Mean	S.D
1	Providing explicit instruction on the components of effective academic writing, including thesis statements, organization, use of sources, and academic conventions.	F	7	20	8	7	2.36	0.95
		%	17.1	47.6	19.0	16.2		
2	Using peer review and collaborative writing activities.	F	14	13	9	6	2.17	1.04
		%	33.3	31.0	21.4	14.3		
3	Receiving individualized writing consultations and feedback from instructors.	F	0	5	9	28	3.55	0.70
		%	0.0	11.9	21.4	66.7		
4	Providing opportunities for students to write in multiple genres (e.g., literature reviews, research proposals, book reviews).	F	6	16	14	6	2.48	0.90
		%	14.8	38.1	33.3	13.8		
5	Practicing paraphrasing and summarizing techniques regularly.	F	6	19	9	8	2.45	0.95
		%	14.9	46.3	20.4	18.4		
6	Reading academic articles/books.	F	3	8	10	21	3.24	0.78
			7.1	19.0	23.8	50.0		

7	Equipping and training instructors on ways to help students improve their academic writing skills.	F	5	17	14	6	2.38	0.93
		%	12.4	40.5	32.9	14.3		
8	Offering workshops, seminars, or online modules on topics such as academic citation, avoiding plagiarism, and enhancing clarity and concision in writing.	F	5	20	10	7	2.45	0.91
		%	12.4	48.1	23.3	16.2		

The analysis of strategies to enhance academic writing among students reveals a range of opinions. Explicit instruction received a mean score of 2.36 (SD = 0.95), with 47.6% finding it somewhat useful, indicating general support but mixed perceptions of effectiveness. Peer review scored lower at 2.17 (SD = 1.04), with 33.3% deeming it not useful, suggesting concerns about its effectiveness. In contrast, individualized feedback was highly valued, achieving a mean score of 3.55 (SD = 0.70), as 66.7% rated it very useful, emphasizing its importance in writing development.

Other strategies showed varied levels of support: writing in multiple genres (mean score 2.48, SD = 0.90) and practicing paraphrasing (mean score 2.45, SD = 0.95) had mixed responses, with many students indifferent. Reading academic materials was well-received (mean score 3.24, SD = 0.78), with 73.8% finding it useful, while instructor training (mean score 2.38, SD = 0.93) revealed a divided perspective. Workshops and seminars scored 2.45 (SD = 0.91), indicating moderate perceived value. Overall, while some strategies are strongly supported, others may require reevaluation or enhancement.

Interview Results and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the data gathered through semi-structured interviews with MA students. A qualitative thematic analysis approach is employed. Lochmiller (2021) states that "thematic analysis involves the identification of recurring patterns that are presented by researchers as overarching statements or themes" (p. 2029).

Academic Writing Challenges Facing MA Students

This analysis identifies four key challenges that MA students encounter in their academic writing, based on the collected data. The responses are coded and categorized into the following areas: Maintaining Appropriate Formality, Developing Academic Vocabulary, Ensuring Cohesion and Coherence, and Paraphrasing.

Maintaining Appropriate Formality

The participants recognize the importance of using a formal academic tone, vocabulary, and sentence structure in their writing. However, students struggle with avoiding more casual language and maintaining the required level of formality. As Participant 7 mentioned, "*formality is very important, writing a thesis with informal vocabulary, sentences, or paragraphs may convey inaccurate information or confusing ideas*." This statement supports Hyland and Jiang's (2017) assertion that formality is a crucial and consistent element of academic writing, aimed at maintaining precision, delivering clear information, and reducing the risk of ambiguity and misinterpretation.

Several participants expressed concerns about their ability to write in a suitably formal style. Participant 3 explained that maintaining formality in academic writing was a big concern. They were aware that using informal language could undermine the credibility and clarity of their work. Participant 5 also acknowledged this challenge, stating, "*Maintaining formality in my writing is difficult. I usually find myself slipping into a more informal tone, which is not appropriate for academic texts*." They recognized the need to be mindful of their language choice and sentence structure to uphold the expected level of formality.

Participant 2 further elaborated on this issue, noting, *"I find it difficult to be clear and concise, while also keeping the formal, academic style required. It's a constant effort to avoid using colloquial expressions"*. The participants' responses indicate that maintaining the appropriate level of formality in their academic writing is an ongoing challenge that requires conscious effort and development of their linguistic skills.

Developing Academic Vocabulary

Participants consistently cited a lack of familiarity with academic vocabulary as a major challenge. They found it difficult to identify and use the appropriate formal words to express their ideas effectively, as Participant 6 stated, "*It is very challenging to find academic vocabulary.*" Participant 3 provided an example, noting that "using academic vocabularies" was difficult, and that "*using phrasing such as, 'put in your mind' is not academic, instead we can say 'put in consideration.*'"

The participants recognized that their limited academic word knowledge hindered their ability to communicate their ideas precisely and convey a scholarly tone in their writings, as Participant 2 explained, "*lack of vocabulary, and or the way of how to construct grammatical structures fulfilling the purpose of the writing*" was a significant challenge. Participant 8 further elaborated on this issue, stating, "*I often struggle to find the appropriate academic terms to accurately convey my thoughts and ideas. This makes it challenging to write in a way that is both precise and sophisticated.*"

Participant 4 and 9 also expressed similar difficulties in utilizing appropriate academic vocabulary in their writing. For instance, Participant 4 commented, "*I often find myself searching for the right academic terms, which is very challenging.*"

Overall, these insights indicate that students face significant challenges in mastering academic vocabulary, which affects their ability to communicate their ideas effectively in writing.

Maintaining Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion and coherence are vital for academic writing, as they ensure that ideas are connected and contextually relevant, making the text more understandable. However, participants indicated significant challenges in maintaining cohesion and coherence in their writing. For example, participant 4 expressed, "*I struggle with using transitions. While I know many transitional words, I'm often unsure how and when to use them effectively. I mostly rely on just a few, like 'however,' and 'additionally.*'" This sentiment was echoed by Participant 6, who noted, "*Sometimes I find it challenging to achieve cohesiveness or to use linking words*," emphasizing their struggle with phrases essential for guiding the reader.

Participant 9 also highlighted difficulties, stating, "*In academic writing, I'm often unsure how to structure my paragraphs and connect them properly*." Participant 1 shared a similar concern, remarking, "*I find it hard to write paragraphs that flow smoothly from one idea to another*". Participant 3 stated, "*I often use a few transitions, but I know I need to use a wider range to connect my points better*," while Participant 8 noted that "*planning the structure beforehand*" helps somewhat, but they still struggle to maintain cohesiveness in their final drafts.

Paraphrasing

Participants reported that they had difficulties in accurately conveying the key ideas and information from sources through paraphrasing. Participants 2, 4 and 7 highlighted the difficulty of finding the right balance between using different words and maintaining the original meaning. For example, Participant 7 states, "*it is very challenging when paraphrasing because I have to use different words and structure while keeping the same meaning*". Participant 4 echoed this, saying, "*I sometimes struggle to find the right words when I paraphrase*." Similarly, Participant 9 noted, "*I don't really know the techniques for effective paraphrasing, and it makes me anxious when I paraphrase*".

The participants recognized the importance of properly incorporating source material into their writing but struggled with the skills required to do so.

Solutions to Enhance Academic Writing Skills among EFL MA Students

The data collected reveal several strategies that students believe would be effective in enhancing their academic writing skills. The key areas identified include reading academic papers, receiving constructive feedback, and practice writing. Each of these strategies is discussed below.

Reading Academic Papers

One of the most commonly mentioned strategies among participants was the value of reading academic articles and research papers. Participants 6 and 9 emphasized that regularly engaging with academic literature plays a crucial role in improving writing proficiency. Participant 9 stated, "*Reading academic papers helps to increase students' vocabulary and improve writing skills*." Similarly, Participant 6 noted, "*Reading more academic articles is very helpful*". This consistent engagement with academic texts allows

students to familiarize themselves with the structure, language, and conventions used in scholarly writing.

Participant 3 further highlighted the transformative impact of reading, stating, "*Reading research papers a lot can make a difference in my writing process*". Exposure to academic discourse through reading provides models of well-structured arguments and in-depth analyses that students can emulate in their own writing. As Participant 1 emphasized, *"I think that reading academic articles is the best way to improve our academic writing*." By regularly engaging with scholarly work, students can develop not only their vocabulary but also their ability to critically evaluate and synthesize information, which are essential skills for producing high-quality academic writing.

Receiving Constructive Feedback

Receiving detailed and constructive feedback was highlighted as a crucial factor in enhancing academic writing skills. Participants 2, 5, 7 and 9 identified professor feedback as one of the most valuable strategies in helping them recognize and correct their mistakes. Participant 5 remarked, "*Receiving written feedback from my professor on my assignments made me aware of my mistakes and taught me how to avoid them in the future*." Similarly, Participant 2 noted, "*The most effective strategy for me is receiving feedback from my professors on my writing*," underscoring the importance of personalized guidance in skill development.

Participant 9 echoed these sentiments, sharing how written feedback from their instructor helped them identify specific areas for improvement: "*Receiving feedback from my professor allows me to recognize areas where I need to improve.*" This underscores the significance of tailored feedback in helping students understand where they need improvement and providing them with actionable steps to enhance their writing.

Consistent and personalized feedback not only corrects errors but also helps guide students toward more effective writing. By combining this feedback with reflective practices, students can gain a deeper understanding of their writing process, allowing for more significant and lasting improvements in their academic writing skills.

Practice Writing

In addition to reading and receiving feedback, participants emphasized the importance of consistent writing practice. Participant 4 suggested that *"frequent essay writing on various topics"* would give students more opportunities to refine their skills. Similarly, Participant 1 noted, *"The more we practice writing, the more our skills improve,"* highlighting the value of regular practice in building proficiency.

Writing across different subjects allows students to explore a range of styles, arguments, and formats, which, in turn, enhances their academic writing skills. This breadth of practice encourages them to experiment with complex ideas and engage in deeper critical thinking. Participant 6 recommended activities like contributing to university magazines, which would not only provide practical experience but also help students gain confidence in their academic writing abilities. Therefore, regular and varied writing practice is crucial for improving fluency, adaptability, and overall competence in academic writing.

Discussion of Results Regarding Academic Writing Challenges Facing MA Students

The data from both the questionnaire and interviews reveal that MA students encounter several challenges in academic writing. A significant challenge is maintaining the appropriate level of formality. Over 53% of students reported difficulties using a formal academic tone and vocabulary, contrasting with Mutimani's (2016) findings, which suggest students do not face such issues. This discrepancy raises questions about the variability in students' experiences.

Interviews corroborate students' struggles with developing academic vocabulary, aligning with Almatarneh et al. (2018), who found that more than half of Jordanian postgraduate participants face similar challenges. This is supported by research from Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022), Alharbi (2017), Sajjad et al. (2021), and Mustafa et al. (2022), emphasizing that limited academic vocabulary is a common issue.

Another significant challenge is maintaining cohesion and coherence. Over 66% of students reported difficulties in this area, with 47.6% finding it "very challenging." Students face issues using transitions and cohesive devices, leading to a lack of smooth flow in their writing. This aligns with findings from Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022) and Aiblu and

Madanu (2023), which highlight similar difficulties among Libyan university students. Studies by Almatarneh et al. (2018) and Alharbi (2017) also demonstrate comparable struggles faced by students in using cohesive devices.

The questionnaire reveals that 81% of students struggle to articulate clear and concise thesis statements, essential for guiding their writing. This aligns with Aldabbus and Almansouri's (2022) study on thesis formulation difficulties. Additionally, students often have trouble constructing coherent arguments, which can lead to vague writing, echoing Alharbi's (2017) findings.

Students encounter significant difficulties summarizing key points from research literature, with about 50% reporting this task as 'very challenging.' This finding is consistent with Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022) and Mustafa et al. (2022), suggesting summarizing is a widespread issue among students.

Additionally, 41.7% of students described applying critical thinking skills as "very challenging," with 22.0% considering it "extremely challenging." This aligns with Alharbi's (2017) research, which emphasizes the negative impact of weak critical thinking on students' writing abilities.

Interviews reveal significant difficulties with paraphrasing. Findings from Almatarneh et al. (2018) show that only 14 out of 90 participants reported no difficulties with paraphrasing, while studies by Mustafa et al. (2022) and Sajjad et al. (2021) highlight similar challenges. Al-Shredi (2024) further supports these findings, identifying specific paraphrasing challenges faced by Libyan EFL MA students.

Discussion of Results Regarding Strategies for Enhancing Academic Writing Skills among EFL MA Students

The findings from the analysis of questionnaire and interview data reveal several strategies that students believe could enhance their academic writing skills. A significant insight is that individualized writing consultations and feedback from instructors are seen as highly effective.

Many participants emphasized the importance of feedback, highlighting it as a valuable strategy for enhancing their writing abilities. Feedback corrects mistakes and provides insights into writing processes, helping students understand academic writing

nuances. This emphasis aligns with Mutimani (2016), where 96.5% of students considered feedback crucial for improving their skills. Studies by Arif et al. (2020) and AlMarwani (2020) also support that constructive and regular feedback significantly enhances academic writing by making students aware of their weaknesses.

Another useful strategy identified is reading academic articles and books, with 73.8% of students considering this beneficial. Participants noted that regularly reading academic papers plays a crucial role in improving writing proficiency. This view aligns with Linuwih (2021), who states that reading enhances academic writing by increasing vocabulary and exposing students to various discourses. Alharbi (2017) also found that reading academic papers is essential for learning structure, organizing ideas, and familiarizing with academic language.

Additionally, Arif et al. (2020) suggest that critical reading helps students analyze different writing styles and reflect on their practices. This confirms that regular reading is crucial for improving writing skills and understanding academic conventions.

Participants also identified practicing writing as a key strategy. They emphasized that consistent writing practice is essential for skill development. Frequent essay writing provides valuable opportunities for refinement and encourages engagement with different genres, leading to a nuanced understanding of academic discourse. Supporting this, Alharbi (2017) found that extensive writing practice helps students overcome academic writing challenges. He suggests requiring multiple drafts of academic papers in early education stages to improve the final product and instill discipline and patience through the revision process.

Conclusion

The primary aims of this research were to identify the challenges that EFL MA students encounter when writing academically and to propose effective strategies to address these issues. Data was collected using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The research revealed that MA students frequently face significant challenges in various aspects of their writing. Specifically, they struggle to achieve the appropriate level of formality necessary for academic discourse. Additionally, these students often find it difficult to select suitable academic vocabulary and use it correctly in context.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that students frequently encounter challenges in presenting a clear progression of ideas and establishing coherent connections between these ideas within sentences and paragraphs. The students also have difficulties in effectively using cohesive devices, as well as difficulties in developing strong thesis statements and constructing logical arguments and organizing them appropriately in their writing. Moreover, the findings indicated that many students find paraphrasing and summarizing research literature to be challenging tasks when writing academic papers. Besides, the students find that applying and demonstrating critical thinking skills in their academic writing was often challenging.

With reference to the findings pertinent to research question two, participants identified strategies for overcoming their writing difficulties. One of the suggested remedies is for students to practice writing and reading frequently.

Students also emphasized the value of receiving personalized writing consultations and feedback from instructors, which significantly enhances their academic writing development. Overall, implementing these strategies could lead to substantial improvements in academic writing skills among MA students.

References

- Aiblu, A., & Madanu, J. P. (2023). Writing Problems that Libyan Students of English Encounter at the English Department, Faculty of Education – Misurata University. *Scientific Journal of Faculty of Education, Misurata University–Libya*, *9*(21), 2710–4141.
- Akhtar, R., Hassan, H., Saidalvi, A., & Hussain, S. (2019). A Systematic Review of The Challenges and Solutions of ESL Students' Academic Writing. *International Journal of Engineering and Advanced Technology*, *8*(5), 1169–1171.
- Al Badi, I. A. H. (2015). Academic Writing Difficulties of ESL Learners. In *The 2015 WEI international academic conference proceedings*, *1*(1), 65–78.
- Aldabbus, S., & Almansouri, E. (2022). Academic Writing Difficulties Encountered by University EFL Learners. *British Journal of English Linguistics*, *10*(3), 1–11.
- Alharbi, N. S. M. (2017). *An investigation into the academic writing: Difficulties of Saudi Postgraduate Students*. University of Exeter (United Kingdom).

- AlMarwani, M. (2020). Academic Writing: Challenges and Potential Solutions. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL* (6). 114-121.
- Almatarneh, A. H. M., Ab Rashid, R., & Yunus, K. (2018). The Academic Writing Experience of Jordanian Postgraduate Students at a University in Malaysia. *Arab World English Journal, 9*(3), 248-257.
- Al-Mukdad, S. (2019). Investigating English academic writing problems encountered by Arab International University students. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *9*(3), 300-306.
- Al-Shredi, N. (2024). Libyan EFL MA Students' Paraphrasing Skills: Perceptions, Challenges, and Techniques. *Faculty of Languages Journal-Tripoli-Libya*, *1*(30).
- Arif, A. A., Shah, S., Fakhra, F., & Ali, H. (2020). An Investigation on Academic Writing Problems Encountered by Undergraduate Students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sanghar Campus. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, *68*(2422-8435). https://doi.org/10.7176/jlll/68-03
- Asnas, S. A. M. (2022). The Academic Writing Challenges Faced by Indonesian Undergraduate EFL learners at University of Islam Malang. *Jurnal Penelitian, Pendidikan, dan Pembelajaran*, *17*(11).
- Ben Aissa, S. (2018). *Writing Difficulties of EFL Learners First Year Pupils of El Shikh Mohammed Abdou Secondary School In Ghar -Tamanrasset as a Case Study* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Adrar.
- Budjalemba, A. S., & Listyani, L. (2020). Factors contributing to students difficulties in academic writing class: Students perceptions. *UC Journal: ELT, Linguistics and Literature Journal*, *1*(2), 135-149.
- Bulqiyah, S., Mahbub, M., & Nugraheni, D. A. (2021). Investigating Writing Difficulties in Essay Writing: Tertiary Students' Perspectives. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, *4*(1), 61-73.
- Fang, Z. (2021). *Demystifying Academic Writing: Genres, Moves, Skills, and Strategies* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131618.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2016). A Path to Better Writing: Evidence-based Practices in The Classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, *69*(4), 359-365.
- Hyland, K., & Jiang, F. K. (2017). Is academic writing becoming more informal?. *English for specific purposes*, *45*, 40-51.

- Khazaal, E. N. (2019). Improving Postgraduates' Academic Writing Skills with Summarizing Strategy. *Arab World English Journal*, *10* (3) 413-428.
- Linuwih, E. R. (2021). The effectiveness of extensive reading in improving EFL academic writing. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, *6*(1), 167-177.
- Maiyoritsa, L., & Wahyuni, D. (2021). An analysis of students techniques in paraphrasing at English department Universitas Negeri Padang. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, *10*(2), 264-271.
- Melville, T. (2020). *An Investigation into the Challenges Undergraduate Students Face in Academic Writing at a Jamaican University* (Dissertation). Trevecca Nazarene University.
- Mustafa, A., Arbab, A. N., & El Sayed, A. A. (2022). Difficulties in Academic Writing in English as a Second/Foreign Language from the Perspective of Undergraduate Students in Higher Education Institutions in Oman. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, *13*(3), 41-53. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no3.3
- Mutimani, M. M. (2016). *Academic writing in English: Challenges experienced by Bachelor of Education primary level students at the University of Namibia, Katima Mulilo campus* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Namibia).
- Sajjad, I., Sarwat, S., Imran, M., & Shahzad, S. K. (2021). Examining the academic writing challenges Faced by university students in KFUEIT. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, *18*(10), 1759-1777.
- Singh, A. A., & Lukkarila, L. (2017). *Successful academic writing: A complete guide for social and behavioral scientists*. Guilford Publications.
- Umamah, A., Hidayanti, I., & Kurniasih, K. (2019). Kesulitan mahasiswa dalam menulis teks eksposisi: Analisis berbasis gender. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, *4*(1), 33-50.