Cracking the Code of Academic Writing: Student Insights on Academic Writing Hurdles & Breakthroughs

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Abstract—The objective of this study is to analyse and compare students' challenges and solutions in academic writing within the *Professional Writing* course. A case study approach was employed, with academic writing hurdles serving as the independent variable and student learning progress as the dependent variable. Data were collected using a mixed-method questionnaire and interviews. The participants included twenty-eight undergraduate students from the English Education Department. Findings indicate that the null hypothesis is rejected, demonstrating a significant impact of academic writing challenges on students' learning progress. Eleven major challenges were identified, including difficulties with cohesion, coherence, grammar, and various stages of the writing process. To address these issues, students adopted multiple strategies, such as seeking support from peers and lecturers, using digital tools like Grammarly, reading academic references, and watching instructional videos. The study suggests prioritizing coherence and cohesion training, digital tool integration, and peer collaboration in academic writing instruction. These insights can help educators develop more effective strategies to support student success in academic writing.

Keywords—*academic writing, writing challenges, student perceptions, professional writing.*

1.   Introduction

Writing academic texts in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is often perceived as a challenging and complex task due to the numerous academic conventions that must be followed. Asaad and Shabdin (2021) argue that students frequently encounter writing difficulties related to grammar and vocabulary when composing academic texts. Consequently, developing the necessary skills to produce scientific papers or academic writing becomes a significant challenge for students. Ahmed et al. (2021) emphasize that university students are required to enhance their academic writing skills to be able to write and publish research articles. At the university level, students face difficulties in compiling scientific articles because they must consider various aspects to produce cohesive and coherent academic texts. Effective academic writing requires mastery of linguistic features, foundational topic knowledge, familiarity with research referencing, and the ability to compose the various parts of a research article (Altunkaya & Ayrancı, 2020; Meza et al., 2021; Teng, 2021).

Academic writing is viewed as a complex type of writing due to the intricate conventions involved. Fang (2021) states that academic writing plays a crucial role in academic learning, as it serves to produce, codify, transmit, evaluate, revise, teach, and learn knowledge and ideologies. Key features of academic writing include the use of technical vocabulary, general academic language, complex noun phrases, markers of argumentation, and passive voice constructions. Mastery of these features can assist students in improving their academic writing competence. According to Fang (2021), academic writing requires seventeen distinct skills, including contextualizing, summarizing, quoting, sourcing, developing

arguments for and against a topic, evaluating, defining, exemplifying, explaining, describing, comparing, classifying, referencing visuals, presenting alternative viewpoints, recommending, and connecting ideas. Each of these skills is governed by its own set of academic conventions.

Several previous studies have investigated academic writing skills. The first study by Asaad and Shabdin (2021) revealed that second language learners often experience difficulties in composing academic texts due to issues with grammar and vocabulary. However, these challenges can be mitigated through improved morphological awareness and vocabulary knowledge, as reflected in the objectives of their research. Their study employed a correlational research method to examine the relationship between academic writing proficiency and morphological awareness. The findings indicated that explicit instruction in morphology could benefit postgraduate students by enhancing their productive writing abilities and enabling them to convey ideas more effectively. In another study, Campbell (2019) explored the application of theoretical frameworks in academic writing classes to help both local and international students overcome language barriers. While the methodology was not explicitly mentioned, the findings suggested that applying structured frameworks supported students in producing academic texts that were effective for various audiences and purposes. The study also emphasized the importance of clear learning objectives and assignment criteria in facilitating complex academic writing tasks.

In a third study, Celik (2020) investigated the complexity of academic writing, particularly among doctoral students. The research aimed to assess the impact of a process-based approach on students' attitudes toward academic writing, using an action research design. The findings demonstrated that students experienced positive outcomes in developing their academic writing skills, particularly in areas such as writing organization, self-regulation, writing standards, and evaluation. Meza et al. (2021), in another relevant study, noted that writing in the academic domain—especially in English as a second or foreign language—posed numerous challenges due to different writing norms and linguistic characteristics. Their study focused on the effects of reflective learning, formative feedback, and self-assessment on the academic writing skills of EFL pre-service teachers. Using a qualitative action research design, they found that reflective learning improved students' self-regulation and metacognitive awareness. Similarly, Ratnawati et al. (2018) discovered that EFL students in Indonesia struggled with academic writing, particularly in using correct grammar, generating ideas, employing appropriate academic diction, and receiving effective writing instruction. Their experimental study aimed to explore students' needs and perspectives regarding academic writing for compulsory courses focused on scientific article production.

In another significant study, Teng (2021) found that EFL learners often lack essential writing skills such as planning, organizing, monitoring, and evaluating. To address this gap, Teng conducted an experimental study to evaluate the effectiveness of incorporating metacognitive prompts into collaborative writing activities. The results revealed significant improvements in students' academic writing skills, particularly from pre-test to post-test performance, underscoring the value of integrating metacognitive strategies in writing instruction. Toprak and Yucel (2020) analysed 600 postgraduate theses in education written between 2007 and 2015, focusing on the originality and incidence of plagiarism. Their descriptive study showed concerning findings regarding the quality and ethical standards of Turkish students' academic writing. Approximately 34.5% of these were checked for plagiarism, and 28.7% lacked originality. The researchers concluded that both students and their supervisors lacked adequate understanding and strategies for producing ethically sound academic work.

These seven studies collectively provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges students face in academic writing across diverse EFL contexts, including Malaysia (Asaad & Shabdin, 2021), Canada (Campbell, 2019), Turkey (Celik, 2020; Toprak & Yucel, 2020), Colombia (Meza et al., 2021), Indonesia (Ratnawati et al., 2018), and China (Teng, 2021). The primary focus of these studies revolves around writing instruction strategies, pedagogical methods, and document-based analyses of students'

writing. The methodologies employed in these studies vary from correlational and experimental research to action research, literature review, and descriptive studies. These prior findings contribute both theoretical and practical insights into improving academic writing instruction. However, what sets the present study apart is its unique emphasis on students' perspectives regarding their writing challenges and their self-identified solutions. Therefore, this study aims to explore how undergraduate EFL students perceive their academic writing difficulties and the strategies they employ to overcome them- an area not extensively addressed in previous literature.

2.   Literature Review

Academic writing is a fundamental component of higher education, requiring students to not only master language mechanics but also develop critical thinking, argumentation, and organizational skills (Hyland, 2019). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), academic writing becomes even more complex due to cultural and linguistic differences that impact students' comprehension and production of scholarly texts. As global academic standards continue to emphasize publication, research output, and scholarly communication, academic writing instruction in EFL contexts has become an urgent focus of pedagogical innovation (Canagarajah, 2020).

One of the recurring themes in the literature is the cognitive and rhetorical challenge faced by EFL learners. Leki (2007) notes that non-native speakers often struggle with understanding genre expectations, audience awareness, and rhetorical structures that differ from those of their native language. These challenges are compounded by limited exposure to English academic texts and a lack of familiarity with the conventions required in scholarly communities (Swales & Feak, 2012). Consequently, learners tend to produce texts that lack cohesion, coherence, and academic tone, despite having sound content knowledge.

Moreover, scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the role of identity and agency in academic writing. Ivanič (1998) argues that writing is not a neutral skill but a social practice in which writers negotiate their identity, authority, and epistemological stance. For EFL students, who may feel linguistically and culturally marginalized, constructing a confident academic voice is particularly difficult (Morita, 2004). This has prompted a shift in writing pedagogy toward fostering students' self-awareness and authorial presence in their texts.

The integration of technology in writing instruction has also gained prominence. Digital tools such as writing support applications, collaborative platforms, and e-feedback systems have been found to assist students in drafting and revising more effectively (Zhang, 2022). For instance, Chen and Yu (2019) found that using automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools significantly improved learners' grammatical accuracy and syntactic complexity, although the tools alone could not replace the role of guided instructor feedback.

Another key development in the literature is the movement toward process-oriented writing instruction. Rather than focusing solely on product outcomes, scholars now emphasize writing as a recursive process involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Badger & White, 2000). Research by Barkaoui (2007) shows that students' writing improves significantly when instruction incorporates explicit training in each stage of the writing process, coupled with peer and teacher feedback.

Despite the robust scholarship on academic writing, relatively few studies have focused specifically on how EFL university students themselves perceive their challenges and articulate their strategies for overcoming them. While studies such as those by Li and Barnard (2011) and Bitchener and Ferris (2012) provide insights into teacher and researcher perspectives, they do not sufficiently capture students' own voices and learning experiences.

In light of this gap, the present study aims to explore students' perceptions of academic writing challenges and the strategies they adopt to cope with those difficulties. By focusing student perspectives within an EFL undergraduate context, this research contributes to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of academic writing pedagogy and supports the development of learner-centered instructional models.

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3. Research Methods (Times New Roman 11pt (Bold))

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the academic writing challenges and solutions perceived by EFL undergraduate students. A case study approach is particularly suitable for this research as it allows an in-depth exploration of real-life experiences within a bounded system—in this case, the experience of students enrolled in a specific academic writing course (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researchers aimed to gain insights into the students' perspectives by examining their reflections and patterns of behaviour regarding academic writing practices. This design supports the collection of rich, descriptive data from multiple sources, which contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation. By focusing on a single class of students in a particular course and academic setting, the researchers were able to analyse the contextual factors that shape students' academic writing development.

The participants in this study consisted of twenty-eight undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at a public university in Central Java, Indonesia. These participants were purposively selected because they were all taking the *Professional Writing* course during the Even Semester of the 2021/2022 Academic Year. The class was considered appropriate for the study as it directly focused on academic writing instruction and provided consistent content exposure to all participants. All students belonged to the same cohort and received similar learning experiences, thus enhancing the validity of comparisons across their responses. Ethical considerations were observed, with students being informed of the research objectives and voluntarily participating in the study.

The *Professional Writing* course was designed to help students develop essential academic writing skills, including logical reasoning, persuasive argumentation, and critical evaluation. Students were expected to produce both argumentative essays and research articles throughout the semester, which involved applying higher order thinking skills and adhering to academic conventions. Moreover, the course provided instruction on the structure and style of academic texts suitable for publication in national and international journals. It also introduced students to citation and referencing standards, paraphrasing techniques, and formal academic language use. As such, the course served as a relevant and authentic context to investigate students' writing challenges and strategies.

The data collection process employed two qualitative instruments: a mixed-format questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, was distributed via Google Forms to ensure accessibility and convenience for all participants. The open-ended questions encouraged students to elaborate on the difficulties they experienced and the methods they used to address those difficulties. To complement the questionnaire data, follow-up interviews were conducted through voice notes using the WhatsApp application. This approach was chosen to allow students to speak freely in a familiar, low-pressure environment, thereby increasing the authenticity and depth of their responses.

In terms of data analysis, the researchers utilized thematic analysis to identify patterns across the data. Responses from the questionnaires and interviews were first transcribed and organized according to emerging categories. These categories were then reviewed and refined to form broader themes that captured the students' shared experiences and individual insights. Themes such as "grammatical difficulties," "idea generation struggles," "technology use for support," and "collaborative learning strategies" were identified as key focal points. The findings were presented based on these themes to

highlight both the common and unique aspects of students' academic writing journeys, thus contributing to the validity and reliability of the study's conclusions.

4. Result and Discussion (Times New Roman 11pt (Bold))

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Problematics Writing Academic

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire results, eleven key aspects were identified as common challenges faced by students in academic writing, particularly within the *Professional Writing* course. These challenges include: (1) difficulties in generating ideas for writing, (2) issues with organizing content in a logical and coherent sequence, (3) problems related to word choice or diction, (4) grammatical inaccuracies, (5) spelling errors, (6) challenges in developing supporting ideas or arguments, (7) incorrect use of punctuation, (8) improper use of capital and lowercase letters, (9) difficulties in paraphrasing and summarizing information, (10) problems with writing proper in-text citations, and (11) errors in formatting bibliographies or reference lists. These issues reflect both surface-level language concerns and deeper cognitive and structural challenges in academic writing. The percentage distribution of each aspect of academic writing difficulties is presented in the figure below, highlighting the most and least frequently encountered problems among students. This quantitative insight provides a clearer understanding of the areas that require pedagogical attention and targeted instructional support.
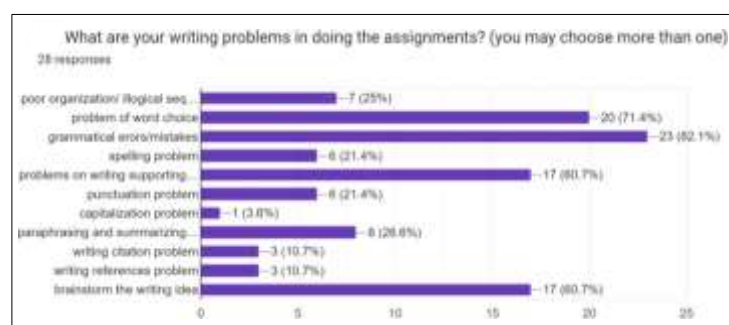
Picture 1. Data Percentage Every Aspect Problem Writing Academic

Figure 1 illustrates that the most prominent academic writing difficulty faced by students is grammar, reported by 82.1% of participants. In contrast, the issue with capitalization and lowercase usage was the least frequently reported, at only 3.6%. These findings highlight the urgent need for students to enhance their academic writing skills, particularly in mastering grammatical rules. Writing academic texts in English—especially in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context—requires a deep understanding of complex grammatical structures and conventions. As noted by Bulqiyah et al. (2021), linguistic competence in general, and grammatical knowledge in particular, remain significant barriers for students in academic writing tasks such as essay composition. Therefore, both students and instructors must give focused attention to improving linguistic awareness and usage.

The issue of capitalization and lowercase usage, although less common, is closely related to students' accuracy and attention to detail. This suggests that writing academic texts in a foreign or second language demands not only language proficiency but also meticulousness and persistence. Academic writing involves mastering numerous technical aspects, which can be challenging for non-native speakers. Kim (2019) emphasizes that academic writing in English as a second language is inherently multidimensional. According to Kim, it encompasses five key competencies: content appropriateness, structural coherence, grammatical accuracy, lexical control, and correct punctuation usage.

In addition to questionnaire data, this study also examined student perceptions gathered through interviews, focusing on the perceived difficulty of various stages in the academic writing process. The writing process was divided into six distinct stages: pre-writing, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and submitting/publishing. Based on interview responses, students identified each stage as difficult in different ways, reflecting the complexity and recursive nature of the writing process. These insights provide a deeper understanding of the specific cognitive and affective challenges students face at each stage of composing an academic text.

The pre-writing stage, for instance, was described as one of the most difficult by several students. Student A stated, *"I think the most difficult writing stage is pre-writing because it's challenging to create new ideas and to start writing."* This highlights a common issue among EFL learners: the struggle to generate original ideas in a second language, particularly when they lack confidence or sufficient background knowledge. The pre-writing stage demands creativity, topic comprehension, and the ability to connect prior knowledge with academic expectations—skills that are not easily developed without consistent practice and guidance.

Subsequent data from other students revealed similar struggles in later stages of writing. For example, Student C emphasized the complexity of the planning stage, noting that it required extensive research and logical structuring. Student B discussed difficulties during the drafting phase, particularly in formulating coherent points and revising initial ideas. These responses, along with others from the interview data, demonstrate that each stage presents unique cognitive demands that require targeted instructional support. Overall, the findings underscore the need for comprehensive, process-oriented academic writing instruction that equips students with both linguistic competence and strategic awareness across all writing phases.

Data 1. Response from Student A regarding *pre - writing* as the most difficult stage

"I think the most difficult writing stage is pre- writing because it's challenging to create new ideas and to start writing."

Data 2. Response from Student C related *planning* as the most difficult stage

"Planning stage is difficult because it requires much research and it must be structured, can be proven, and have correlation which is hard for me compared to another phase."

Data 3. Response from Student B related *drafting* as the most difficult stage

"Making drafts is a little difficult because sometimes I have trouble writing the right points or draft. I also make multiple changes in the draft."

Data 4. Response from Student H related *revision* as the most difficult stage

"Revision is difficult due to it requires precision and perseverance."

Data 5. Response from Student J regarding *editing* as the most difficult stage

"I think editing is like writing from the beginning. So, it takes more time to think."

Data 6. Response from Student M regarding *submitting / publishing* as the most difficult stage

"I have to force and motivate myself to submit or publish my work, especially in a journal."

Data 1 to 6 demonstrate that students hold varying perceptions regarding the most challenging stages in the academic writing process. These perceptions are influenced by their prior experiences with academic assignments, such as writing argumentative essays and composing mini research articles. Student A identified the pre-writing stage as the most difficult, stating that generating new ideas and beginning the writing process posed significant challenges. Student C considered the planning stage to be the hardest, as it required extensive research and the careful organization of ideas and references before writing could begin. Student B reported that the drafting stage

was particularly challenging due to his inability to produce well-structured drafts and his tendency to frequently revise his work.

Furthermore, Student H found the revising stage difficult, highlighting that it demands a high level of accuracy and perseverance to identify and correct errors. Student J identified the editing stage as the most time-consuming and mentally exhausting, as it often required starting the revision process from the beginning to ensure the text met academic standards. Lastly, Student M perceived the submitting/publishing stage as the most difficult because it required self-motivation and confidence to share his academic work with a wider audience, particularly through journal submission. These diverse responses emphasize that each stage of academic writing presents unique cognitive and emotional demands, reinforcing the importance of individualized support and strategy instruction throughout the writing process.

4.1.2 Solution for Problematics Academic Writing

Based on the interview results, several solutions to academic writing challenges were identified by the students. These strategies can serve as alternative approaches for other learners experiencing similar difficulties. The solutions reflect students' efforts to overcome obstacles in grammar, idea development, organization, and other aspects of academic writing. Notably, these responses demonstrate a growing sense of learner autonomy, as students actively seek out tools and techniques to support their writing process. Some illustrative examples of these student-identified solutions are presented in the data below.

Data 7. Solution from Student D

"For grammatical errors/mistakes, I usually use the website Grammarly to help me correct the grammar of my paragraphs. For problems writing supporting ideas/ arguments, I will read a lot about issues regarding the topics I will write about or discuss. After that, I will combine the information to support the writing of my arguments. As I mentioned above, I will read various sources on the issues or topics I will write about or discuss problems on brainstorming the writing idea. After that, I will compile a framework from the information I have gathered."

Data 8. Solution from Student F

"I don't usually push myself when I'm scrambling for ideas, but I search a lot and read the writings on the Internet for brainstorming and provide a broader picture. For grammar issues, word choice, and so on, I looked and corrected applications like Grammarly and stuff."

Data 9. Solution from Student O

"I ask for help from the lecturer or my friends; sometimes I watch the tutorial in YouTube."

Data 10. Solution from Student N

"I solve my problem in a professional writing course by training myself to read a book. By getting used to reading, my grammar skills will be trained."

Data 7 to 10 indicate that students have independently discovered solutions to the academic writing challenges they encounter in the *Professional Writing* course. Student D explained that he uses the Grammarly application to assist with grammar correction. In addition, he reads a variety of reference materials to help him generate ideas and construct supporting arguments. Student F mentioned that he searches for sources online and reads them to gain a broader understanding of the topic he intends to write about; he also relies on Grammarly for grammar support. Student O shared that he seeks help from lecturers and peers when facing academic writing difficulties and supplements his learning by watching instructional videos on YouTube. Meanwhile, Student N reported that reading books is his preferred strategy, as he believes that frequent reading helps improve his grammatical skills.

These student responses demonstrate that learners are actively leveraging technology—such as Grammarly and YouTube—to enhance their academic writing abilities. Moreover, they reflect a shift toward greater learner autonomy, as students take initiative in identifying and applying tools that support their writing development. According to Gal (2022), autonomous learners possess the capacity to solve problems independently, which is evident in the behaviors shown by these students. Nevertheless, the role of instructors remains essential. Lecturers must continuously provide motivation and positive reinforcement to help students maximize their potential and successfully complete their academic writing assignments. As Tan and Bensal (2021) assert, positive reinforcement in academic writing classrooms can significantly contribute to improved student performance and higher academic achievement.

4.2   Discussion

The This study sought to investigate the academic writing challenges experienced by undergraduate EFL students and the strategies they employ to address those challenges. Data were collected through mixed-methods instruments, including a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that academic writing difficulties experienced by students were both linguistic and procedural in nature, with grammar, idea development, and structuring arguments being the most dominant issues reported. Additionally, students described various coping strategies that involved peer support, lecturer feedback, and the use of digital technologies such as Grammarly and YouTube.

The quantitative data showed that grammatical issues were the most common problem, identified by 82.1% of participants. This is consistent with findings from Bulqiyah, Mahbub, and Nugraheni (2021), who reported that EFL tertiary students in Indonesia frequently struggle with grammar when writing academic essays. Grammar errors not only affect sentence accuracy but also hinder overall message clarity and academic tone. This challenge is particularly significant in contexts where English is not used as a daily communicative tool, and where exposure to well-written academic texts is limited.

The next most common issue reported by students was difficulty in generating ideas during the pre-writing stage. This aligns with the findings of Fang (2021), who emphasized that idea development is a core academic writing skill requiring creativity, topic familiarity, and background reading. Students in this study noted that they often felt overwhelmed at the beginning of the writing process because they lacked sufficient knowledge or inspiration to develop a coherent thesis. This issue also overlaps with students' struggles in planning and structuring their texts logically—an essential step for effective argumentation.

In terms of the writing process, students reported facing difficulties at every stage: pre-writing, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. For instance, the planning stage was found challenging due to its demand for logical organization and evidence-based reasoning. Several participants highlighted that connecting different ideas into a single, structured outline was cognitively demanding. These findings reinforce the theoretical work of Flower and Hayes (1981), who describe writing as a recursive cognitive process that requires coordination of planning, translating, and reviewing.

Drafting and revising were also reported as strenuous phases. Students admitted to rewriting drafts multiple times and facing anxiety when transitioning from brainstorming to formal composition. According to Teng (2021), metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring and self-evaluating are crucial for overcoming such difficulties. However, many participants lacked these strategies, resulting in a trial-and-error approach to revising their drafts. Revision, which demands both precision and critical judgment, was often associated with frustration, especially when the students received vague or inconsistent feedback from instructors.

Interestingly, editing and submitting the final work were perceived as the most emotionally taxing parts of the process. Some students expressed procrastination or hesitation in publishing their work due to fear of criticism or rejection. This sentiment reflects findings from Morita (2004), who emphasized the importance of identity and

emotional investment in academic writing. In EFL settings, learners often feel linguistically and academically insecure, which can inhibit their willingness to finalize and share their work with broader audiences, such as academic journals.

In terms of solutions, the data revealed a notable reliance on digital tools to support academic writing. Grammarly, for instance, was widely used for grammar correction and word choice improvement. This aligns with findings from Chen and Yu (2019), who concluded that automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools help improve surface-level accuracy but are not sufficient substitutes for human feedback. Nonetheless, students appreciated the immediate and accessible support these tools provide, especially in environments where instructor feedback is limited or delayed.

Students also emphasized the value of collaborative learning. Peer discussions and consultations with lecturers were highlighted as effective strategies for overcoming writing barriers. These strategies are consistent with the pedagogical principles proposed by Campbell (2019), who advocated for feedback-rich environments in academic writing instruction. The study confirms that academic writing becomes more manageable when learners engage in dialogue about their writing with peers and instructors, promoting reflection and clearer understanding of expectations.

Additionally, the findings show that students are becoming more autonomous in their approach to learning. Several participants reported using YouTube tutorials and academic blogs to supplement their classroom learning. This behaviour reflects Gal's (2022) conceptualization of the autonomous learner, who actively seeks resources and takes responsibility for their own progress. It also indicates a shift in the learning culture, where students are no longer fully dependent on traditional classroom instruction and instead navigate their own learning pathways through digital platforms.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that academic writing challenges are multifaceted, involving both linguistic proficiency and procedural awareness. The combination of grammatical struggles, lack of strategic planning, emotional barriers, and reliance on self-directed learning tools paints a complex picture of the EFL academic writing experience. What distinguishes this study is its focus on student perception—an aspect often overlooked in existing research. By foregrounding the learner's voice, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how academic writing instruction can be better tailored to meet student needs, thus bridging the gap between pedagogy and practice

5. Conclusions and Practical Implication

This study investigated the perceptions of undergraduate students toward academic writing challenges and the strategies they adopted in the *Professional Writing* course within an EFL context. The findings reveal that students encounter difficulties across a spectrum of technical and procedural elements, particularly in grammar usage, coherence and cohesion, idea generation, and navigating the multi-stage writing process. These difficulties are consistent with global research highlighting that academic writing is a cognitively and linguistically demanding task, especially for learners using English as a foreign language.

Importantly, this study foregrounds the students' agency in identifying and addressing their writing problems. Unlike earlier studies that often emphasize teacher-led interventions, the present research highlights how students autonomously seek out solutions—using grammar-checking tools, reading academic references, consulting with peers and instructors, and engaging with instructional content via digital platforms such as YouTube. These

behaviours suggest that students are not merely passive recipients of instruction but are becoming self-directed learners actively shaping their own writing development.

The study's findings contribute meaningfully to the discourse on academic writing pedagogy by offering a student-centered lens that is often missing in conventional evaluations. The nuanced insights into the specific writing stages that students find most challenging—particularly pre-writing and revising—can inform more targeted instructional designs. For instance, incorporating scaffolding strategies and reflective writing tasks could ease students' cognitive load and enhance their ability to revise critically, thus improving overall writing quality.

In terms of practical implications, educators and curriculum developers are encouraged to integrate writing instruction with digital literacy training and collaborative learning models. Writing courses should not only teach grammatical and rhetorical skills but also include metacognitive activities that foster awareness of the writing process. Moreover, establishing structured feedback mechanisms that combine instructor guidance with peer review can help students refine their ideas and writing strategies more effectively.

In conclusion, the study calls for a more holistic approach to academic writing instruction—one that blends technical proficiency, reflective learning, and technological support. It is essential that higher education institutions recognize the evolving needs of EFL students and provide learning environments that promote autonomy, creativity, and academic integrity. Future research may extend these findings by exploring longitudinal impacts of such learner-centered interventions and their influence on students' academic writing outcomes across disciplines.

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