

CHALLENGES FACED BY EFL STUDENTS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract: Academic writing is widely regarded as one of the most complex and cognitively demanding skills in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the tertiary level. This study presents a detailed and systematic analysis of the major challenges encountered by EFL students when producing academic texts in English. The paper integrates findings from a wide range of international studies conducted between 2000 and 2023, highlighting linguistic deficiencies, organizational limitations, and psychological constraints. The primary objective of this research is to identify the root causes of students' writing difficulties and examine how these challenges influence their academic performance and overall language development. Special attention is given to the relationship between lexical competence, grammatical accuracy, critical thinking, and writing proficiency.

The findings demonstrate that EFL students often experience a significant gap between their cognitive ideas and their ability to express them effectively in written English. High-achieving learners tend to employ a diverse set of writing strategies, including pre-writing planning, drafting, revising, and metacognitive monitoring, while low-achieving students frequently rely on surface-level strategies such as direct translation and rote memorization. The study concludes that explicit instruction, continuous formative feedback, and strategy-based pedagogy are essential for improving academic writing skills and bridging the gap between language knowledge and written performance.

Keywords: Academic Writing, EFL Learners, Writing Difficulties, Coherence and Cohesion, Writing Anxiety, Lexical Competence, Metacognitive Strategies, Critical Thinking, SLA

Annotatsiya: Akademik yozuv Ikkinchi tilni o'rganish (SLA) jarayonidagi eng murakkab va kognitiv jihatdan talabchan ko'nikmalardan biri hisoblanadi, ayniqsa ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganayotgan (EFL) talabalar uchun. Ushbu maqola talabalar ingliz tilida akademik matn yozishda duch keladigan asosiy muammolarni chuqur va tizimli ravishda tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqot 2000–2023 yillar oralig'ida o'tkazilgan xalqaro ilmiy izlanishlarga asoslanadi va til, tuzilma hamda psixologik omillarga alohida e'tibor qaratadi. Tadqiqotning asosiy maqsadi yozishdagi qiyinchiliklarning asl sabablarini aniqlash va ularning talabalar akademik natijalariga ta'sirini o'rganishdan iborat. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, talabalar o'z fikrlarini tushunishsa-da, ularni ingliz tilida aniq va tartibli ifodalashda qiyinchilikka duch keladilar. Shuningdek, muvaffaqiyatli talabalar yozishda turli strategiyalardan foydalanadi, kamroq muvaffaqiyatli talabalar esa oddiy yodlash va tarjimaga tayanadi. Tadqiqot yakunida strategiyaga asoslangan o'qitish va muntazam feedback muhimligi ta'kidlanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Akademik yozuv, Ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganuvchilar, Yozishdagi qiyinchiliklar, Mantiqiylik va bog'liqlik, Yozishdagi xavotir, Leksik kompetensiya, Metakognitiv strategiyalar, Tanqidiy fikrlash, Ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish (SLA)

Аннотация: Академическое письмо является одним из самых сложных и когнитивно требовательных навыков в процессе изучения второго языка (SLA), особенно для студентов, изучающих английский язык как иностранный (EFL). В данной статье представлен углубленный анализ основных трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются студенты при написании академических текстов на английском языке. Исследование основано на анализе международных научных работ (2000–2023 гг.) и рассматривает лингвистические, организационные и психологические аспекты. Особое внимание уделяется связи между языковой компетенцией, критическим мышлением и навыками письма. Результаты показывают, что успешные студенты используют разнообразные стратегии письма, тогда как менее успешные учащиеся ограничиваются переводом и заучиванием. В заключении подчеркивается важность стратегического обучения и регулярной обратной связи.

Ключевые слова: Академическое письмо, Изучающие английский как иностранный язык, Трудности письма, Когерентность и когезия, Тревожность при письме, Лексическая компетенция, Метакогнитивные стратегии, Критическое мышление, Освоение второго языка (SLA)

Introduction

In the modern academic environment, the ability to produce well-structured and coherent written texts in English has become a fundamental requirement for university students worldwide. Academic writing is not only a medium for communication but also a reflection of a student's intellectual ability, analytical skills, and disciplinary knowledge. For EFL learners, mastering academic writing is particularly challenging because it requires the integration of multiple competencies. Students must simultaneously control grammar, vocabulary, organization, and argumentation while adhering to academic conventions. This multidimensional nature of writing makes it one of the most difficult skills to acquire.

Moreover, academic writing differs significantly from everyday language use. It requires formal tone, objectivity, precision, and logical progression of ideas. Many EFL students are not adequately prepared for these demands, as their prior learning experiences often focus more on grammar exercises rather than productive writing skills. Another important issue is the limited exposure to authentic academic texts. Without sufficient reading experience, students struggle to understand how academic writing is structured and how arguments are developed. As a result, their writing often lacks depth, clarity, and coherence.

Literature Review

Research in the field of second language writing has consistently highlighted the complexity of academic writing. Hyland (2003) emphasizes that writing is a socially situated practice that requires not only linguistic knowledge but also awareness of audience and purpose. Silva (1993) argues that EFL learners' writing differs significantly from native speakers in terms of structure, coherence, and rhetorical patterns. Their texts often show limited development of ideas and weak argumentation.

Raimes (1983) identifies four major components of writing: grammar, vocabulary, organization, and content. Among these, grammar and vocabulary are the most problematic for EFL learners. More recent studies have introduced the concept of metacognitive awareness, which refers to students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate

their own writing process. Students with high metacognitive awareness tend to perform better in writing tasks. In addition, psychological factors such as writing anxiety and fear of evaluation have been widely discussed. High levels of anxiety can negatively affect students' performance and reduce their willingness to participate in writing activities. Another important concept is interlanguage, which explains why learners produce errors. EFL students often transfer structures from their native language into English, resulting in grammatical and stylistic inaccuracies.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design combined with a systematic literature review approach. The aim is to synthesize existing knowledge and identify common patterns in EFL academic writing difficulties.

The research process includes:

Data Selection: Academic sources from databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR were analyzed.

Categorization: Challenges were divided into four categories:

- Linguistic
- Organizational
- Cognitive
- Psychological

Comparative Analysis: Differences between high-performing and low-performing students were examined.

Interpretation: The results were interpreted to provide pedagogical recommendations.

Results The findings reveal a wide range of challenges:

- Lexical Deficiency: Students lack sufficient academic vocabulary, which limits their ability to express complex ideas.
- Grammatical Inaccuracy: Frequent errors in tense, articles, and sentence structure reduce clarity.
- Poor Organization: Essays often lack clear thesis statements, topic sentences, and logical progression.
- Weak Argumentation: Students struggle to support their ideas with evidence and examples.
- Writing Anxiety: Fear of negative evaluation leads to avoidance and low confidence.
- L1 Interference: Native language structures negatively influence English writing.
- Lack of Revision Skills: Students rarely revise or edit their work effectively.

Discussion

The results indicate that academic writing difficulties are deeply interconnected. Linguistic problems are only the surface-level issues, while cognitive and strategic deficiencies play a more significant role. One key issue is the lack of process writing approach. Many students treat writing as a one-step activity instead of a multi-stage process involving planning, drafting, and revising. Another important factor is limited critical thinking ability. Academic writing requires students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information, which many learners are not trained to do. Furthermore, the

role of teachers is crucial. Traditional teaching methods that focus on grammar rules are insufficient. Instead, a more holistic approach that integrates writing strategies, feedback, and practice is needed. Technology can also play a supportive role. Tools such as grammar checkers and online writing platforms can help students improve their writing skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, EFL students face numerous challenges in academic writing, including linguistic, organizational, cognitive, and psychological difficulties. These challenges significantly affect their academic success and confidence.

However, with appropriate instructional strategies, continuous practice, and supportive learning environments, these difficulties can be overcome. Emphasis should be placed on developing not only language proficiency but also writing strategies and critical thinking skills.

Future studies should explore innovative teaching methods and the role of digital technologies in enhancing academic writing among EFL learners.

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