



CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS AMONG EFL LEARNERS

Xusayinova Soxiba Tulqin qizi

English Language Teacher, School No. 13, Jomboy District,
Samarkand Region, Uzbekistan

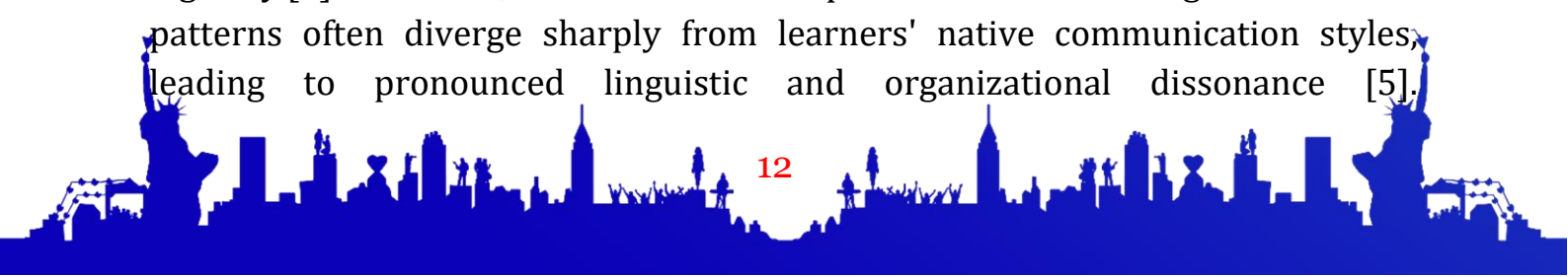
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22643815>

Abstract: Academic writing represents one of the most cognitively demanding and complex competencies required of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in higher education. Mastery of this skill demands not only grammatical precision and lexical breadth, but also structural coherence, rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, and adherence to scholarly conventions. This study examines the primary linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural barriers encountered by undergraduate EFL students in acquiring academic writing proficiency. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach combining corpus-based error analysis of student research drafts and semi-structured diagnostic surveys, the study identifies recurring bottlenecks, particularly in syntactic complexity, academic register, hedging, and argument formulation. The findings highlight pedagogical gaps in genre-based instruction and propose actionable instructional frameworks to mitigate writing anxiety, minimize first-language transfer interference, and enhance scholarly communicative competence.

Keywords: academic writing, EFL learners, writing anxiety, rhetorical competence, first-language transfer, syntactic complexity, genre-based pedagogy.

Introduction In contemporary tertiary education, academic literacy serves as the primary gateway to international scholarship, research dissemination, and professional mobility [1]. However, academic writing is widely recognized as a multifaceted construct that extends far beyond general communicative proficiency [2]. For EFL learners, the transition from conversational or descriptive English to formal scholarly prose introduces significant communicative friction. Scholars frequently encounter students who, despite demonstrating upper-intermediate or advanced grammatical competence in standardized testing, struggle systematically with register, logical sequencing, and objective argumentation [3].

The difficulty stems from the need to manage competing cognitive demands simultaneously: conceptualizing ideas, retrieving specialized vocabulary, maintaining formal tone, adhering to citation protocols, and structuring discourse logically [4]. Moreover, sociocultural assumptions embedded in English rhetorical patterns often diverge sharply from learners' native communication styles, leading to pronounced linguistic and organizational dissonance [5].





Understanding these specific obstacles is essential for developing evidence-based pedagogical interventions.

Methodology The study was conducted with a cohort of 75 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in academic writing and research methodology modules. A mixed-methods descriptive design was employed to capture both product-oriented and process-oriented challenges:

- **Corpus-based error analysis:** A diagnostic corpus of 75 academic term papers (approximately 112,000 words) was analyzed using text-analysis software to categorize structural, lexical, and syntactic deviations.

- **Diagnostic surveys and interviews:** A standardized 20-item survey assessed students' perceived self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and awareness of academic conventions, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 15 participants to explore underlying cognitive and institutional factors.

Results Quantitative and qualitative findings revealed four primary domains of difficulty:

- **Syntactic and Lexical Deficits:** 68% of analyzed drafts demonstrated heavy reliance on informal or colloquial phrases (e.g., *a lot of*, *get*, *bad things*), accompanied by run-on sentences, comma splices, and inconsistent passive voice usage [6].

- **Rhetorical and Discourse Structuring:** 61% of papers struggled with thematic coherence and paragraph development, characterized by abrupt shifts between ideas, weak topic sentences, and underutilization of transitions [7].

- **Hedging and Stance:** Over 74% of participants demonstrated limited familiarity with hedging devices, presenting speculative claims as categorical truths (e.g., using *always*, *definitely*, *proves* instead of *suggests*, *indicates*, *likely*) [8].

- **L1 Interference and Critical Synthesis:** 58% of respondents reported mental translation from their first language, resulting in unnatural collocations and circular argumentation structures common in non-linear rhetorical traditions [9].

Analysis and Discussion The empirical evidence indicates that EFL learners' academic writing difficulties are rarely isolated grammatical failures; rather, they reflect a deeper deficit in rhetorical and genre awareness [10]. When students lack exposure to authentic academic discourse within their disciplinary fields, they default to narrative or conversational frameworks learned in general English courses [11].

Furthermore, first-language rhetorical transfer significantly affects organizational logic. While Anglo-American academic writing prioritizes linear





development, explicit thesis statements, and direct deductive reasoning, many EFL learners come from cultural backgrounds where indirection, contextual elaboration, or decorative prose are preferred [12]. Without explicit instruction in English rhetorical expectations, students frequently interpret critiques of their organization as language failure, which sharply increases writing apprehension and impedes autonomous revision.

Conclusion Developing academic writing competence among EFL learners requires shifting instruction from generic grammar drills to explicit, genre-based, and process-oriented approaches. Curricula should integrate targeted practice in syntactic framing, hedging, source synthesis, and peer review. Addressing writing anxiety and unpacking cultural differences in rhetorical structure enables higher education institutions to better equip EFL learners with the tools required for international academic discourse.

References:

1. Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 21–35.
2. Swales, J. M. (2004). *Research Genres: Explorations and Applications*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 60–74.
3. Flowerdew, J. (2013). Some thoughts on researching L2 academic writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(4), pp. 436–437.
4. Kellogg, R. T. (2008). Training writing skills: A cognitive development perspective. *Journal of Writing Research*, 1(1), pp. 1–26.
5. Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16(1–2), pp. 1–20.
6. Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. R. (2012). *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing*. Routledge, pp. 88–104.
7. Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. Longman, pp. 226–238.
8. Salager-Meyer, F. (1994). Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse. *English for Specific Purposes*, 13(2), pp. 149–170.
9. Connor, U. (2002). New directions in contrastive rhetoric. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(4), pp. 493–510.
10. Johns, A. M. (1997). *Text, Role, and Context: Developing Academic Literacies*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 45–59.
11. Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Pearson Education, pp. 975–984.





12. Paltridge, B. (2004). Academic writing. *Language Teaching*, 37(2), pp. 87–105.

