

ACADEMIC WRITING CHALLENGES FOR ESL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to explore some of the difficulties and challenges that ESL learners experience in academic writing. The study seeks to answer the research question, “What challenges do ESL learners encounter in Academic writing?”, ”What factors can make learners experience challenges?” and “How to deal with these Academic writing challenges?”. The goal is to analyze the data collected from a variety of articles regarding the topic, find relevant references or contradictory viewpoints and come to valid conclusions.

KEYWORDS: English language, academic writing, learning, challenges, research questions

INTRODUCTION

It is claimed that academic writing is a complex process which involves developing a combination of skills, such as planning, thinking, creating ideas, correct use of vocabulary, appropriate complicated grammar structures. Most importantly, in order to write at a good level, formality, objectivity and complexity need to be developed. Therefore, the capacity to write both academically at an advanced or tertiary threshold is often a problematic circumstance for ESL learners. Even in some cases, when struggling with writing, students avoid performing the tasks. It is suggested that writing is not a straightforward process and even professional writers or experts can witness challenges or obstacles so as to produce a work effectively and accurately (Grail, Richard, Jones, 2006; Hinkel, 2004; Salager-Meyer, 2008; Hemmings, Rushbrook and Smiths, 2007; McCormick and Whittington, 2000). It is also important to note that having challenges in writing academically means that there are difficulties among ESL learners when writing and conveying ideas in their first language. In the literature review, based on the topic eight articles have been reviewed and analyzed in order to discover the challenges which ESL learners face when writing both at an academic and tertiary level. The data have been accumulated from diverse sources



supplied by different countries' researchers. According to the findings, the information obtained from the articles has been sorted out by answering three aspects of the topic: firstly, types of challenges are investigated thoroughly, then the factors can be causes of these challenges when writing academically, lastly measures to address the difficulties of academic writing for ESL learners.

MAIN BODY

EFL learners are likely to go through many challenges and obstacles once they implement the target language in practice and they try to apply learning skills and strategies. Among them writing is one of the most challenging aspect that learners face while using the language (Al Badi, 2015; Al Fadda, 2012; Xiao and Chen, 2015). At first, the challenges stemming from Academic writing are analyzed and compared according to the articles given, and similarities and differences in terms of scholars' viewpoints are found. Bayan Mohammed, Ibtisam Salem Ibnian and Hindi Al Fadda state that the common difficulty students face is paraphrasing and summarizing. This means that most EFL learners have lack of knowledge how to paraphrase and summarize. They are not willing to apply plague words correctly, in most cases they just copy and paste the topic without making any transformations of grammar and word formation. Instructors continuously complain about students' short of expertise and certain skills for Academic writing that encompass outlining, paraphrasing and summarizing (Al-Shabanah and Maher, 2005). While Bayan (2017) mentions that some learners tend to overuse the same words and phrases, Salem Ibnian (2017) and Ibtisam's (2015) finding is that students have problems with differentiating written and spoken words, which can lead to the loss of formality in writing. Moreover EFL learners can have difficulties regarding finding right words and phrases for academic writing. As for this challenge, Bayan Mohammed (2017) adds that using appropriate synonyms for writing is another challenge for learners. According to Bayan, Ibtisam, and Nasser, conveying own voice or own ideas is another prevalent challenge among learners. EFL students are unable to express themselves in academic writing which obscure their creativity and imagination (Sura Mutlak Nasser, 2018). Apart from this difficulty, Salem Ibnian points out that the students can face the complication of arranging ideas in a correct way. It is also fundamental to take into consideration selecting key information and leaving out less one when organizing ideas (Bayan 2017). As for grammar knowledge and ability of joining sentences, almost all researchers mention





challenges encountered by learners in these aspects. Oktay Yagiz (2012) state that students need assistance, in particular when applying hedging functions of modal verbs, discourse function of impersonal pronouns and parallel phrase constructions in academic writing. According to Nasser (2018), grammatical difficulties can be classified as misuse of tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, word order, identifying sentence patterns, identifying types of patterns. Although Navaz (2021) argues that lack in practice can result in difficulties for academic writing and Salem suggests that students experience challenges in writing when they have less confidence or hesitation of expressing themselves, the problems stated by these two scholars depend on each other closely. This is mainly because, the less students practice in writing, the more they lose their confidence and hesitate about their own ideas. There are also different points which are not similar to each other expressed researchers concerning this study. For example, while Salem Ibnian discovers the academic writing challenges faced by learners who consider teaching method as poor and not sufficient, Nasser asserts that cultural differences and differences between L1 and L2 are reasons for the challenges. Adding to Nasser ideas, Hind Al Fadda points out that L2 learners do not suffice the mastery of writing in the first language.

ESL learners' challenges in academic writing might happen owing to many factors. including psychological, linguistic and cognitive. According to the articles that have been reviewed, some factors behind the writing difficulties have been suggested, yet they are not fully researched and some articles lack in complete study in terms of this aspect. Ibtisam Ali Hasan Al Badi, Dr Breena Giridharan and Hind Al Fadda assert that one of the reasons causing writing challenges is poor second language proficiency which mostly occur among international students. They feel that most students arrive in English-speaking countries with low level of the language in which they face challenges with writing then. Al Fadda also adds that some ESL learners are unable to conduct productive discussion in the target language that is a key factor influencing academic writing. According to Navaz, inadequate grammar knowledge, lack of exposure to practicing academic writing skills and limited vocabulary are also crucial reasons leading to writing challenges for ESL learners. In the article of Ibtisam Ali Hasan Al Badi's, he cited from Chou (2011) who has listed a number factors students face difficulties when writing their assignments. For example, students often come from different countries and different backgrounds, and in most cases they depend on their



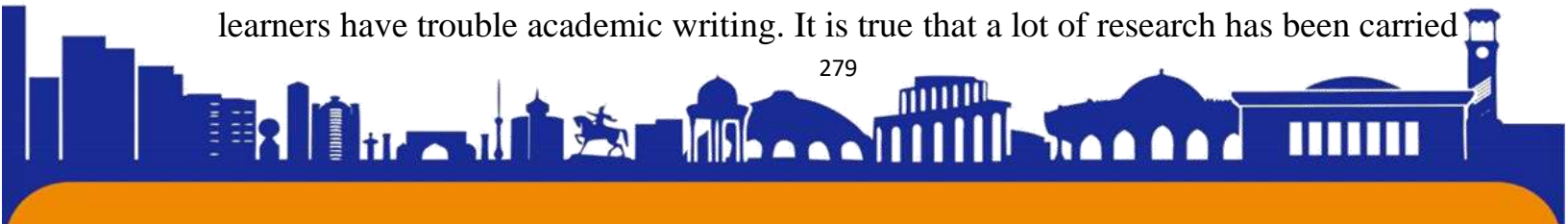


teachers when performing writing activities. In addition he states that learners have not been instructed to think critically. Chou also points out that some students feel shy and unconfident to ask about clear instructions and guidelines from their teachers, while in some cases teachers tend to expect more satisfactory performance from learners and they assign with a huge quantity of assignments which leads to ESL learners' inability to generate good writing production.

According to the articles, despite there being a lack of investigation, the scholars produce some solutions and suggestions to cope with academic writing challenges for ESL learners. Almost all researchers have come to the conclusion that in order to improve academic writing skills, learners should be exposed to carrying out more grammar and vocabulary practices as they make up the basics of creating a good composition. For example, Al Badi (cited from Abdulkarem, 2013), Dr Beena Giridharam and Alison Robson (2011) point out that teaching words, phrases and grammar can play an important role to generate a satisfying academic writing discourse, whereas Navaz (2021) more emphasize teaching grammar, especially complex grammar structures for improving ESL learners' writing skills. In Addition, feedback from both peers and instructors can be effective technique for addressing academic writing challenges, by which learners are able to recognize their weak points or mistakes while writing academic discourse (Giridharam and Robson, 2011; Pablo and Lasaten, 2018). Pablo and Lasaten add that reading sample academic essays is highly likely to help learners to deal with the difficulties in a productive way. According to Hind al Fadda (2011), communication with native English speakers can play a crucial role to enhance ESL learners' writing, as native speakers tend to instruct them how to plan effectively and organize data in a reasonable way, as well as guide them to step by step writing. In spite of the fact that Salem Ibnian states that teaching students how to plan a composition, in particular students with high level of anxiety, can be a huge effect on handling academic writing difficulties, Al badi stresses forcing students to be autonomous learners.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, academic writing is hard to attain, particularly in second language. In most cases, instructors find that students struggle with writing academically, it is also complex to improve and make progress. Hence, a lot of researchers have confirmed that learners have trouble academic writing. It is true that a lot of research has been carried





out to investigate the challenges when writing academically. Yet, additional work on how to deal with these challenges to enhance writing skills should be undertaken. It is recommended that further research should be done to advance academic writing skills in specific domains and educational institutions.

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