



---

**Pen to Paper: Unraveling University Students' Perceived Academic Writing Difficulties across Gender and Academic Disciplines**

Hakim Ali,<sup>1</sup> Sumaira Rehan,<sup>2</sup> & Bashir Hussain<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:**

Proficiency in academic writing is considered as one of the most requisite and indispensable skills for university students to master worldwide. The mastery in this skill involves students' capability to express and organize innovative ideas along with use of sentences with accuracy to create logical, meaningful and coherent text. The main objective of this study, therefore, was to examine university students' perceived academic writing difficulties across gender and academic disciplines. This research employed quantitative research design; a self-developed survey questionnaire, comprising 36 items and distributed in three subscales, was designed to seek views of 442 university students about difficulties they face while engaging with academic writing. Three types of statistical techniques were used to analyze quantitative data i.e., factor analysis, descriptive statistics (Percentage, Mean score, SD) and inferential statistics to analyze and compare university students' views about their academic writing difficulties. The findings of the factor analysis supported the use of the Academic Writing Difficulties Questionnaire [AWDQ] as a valid tool to analyze university students' perception of their academic writing difficulties. This study also suggests some potential solutions for students as well as teachers to overcome students' academic writing difficulties.

**Keywords:** Academic writing difficulties, writing challenges, university students' perception, factor analysis, gender differences

**INTRODUCTION**

Academic writing being a formal writing style is essentially different from everyday writing. This formal writing style uses more academic words and complex sentences, has specific format with

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Education, Government Wilayat Hussain Islamia Graduate College, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: hakimaliwhisl@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Education, Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan. Email: baigsumairarehan@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Education, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Email: bashirhussain@bzu.edu.pk

certain features and advances arguments in logical way considering the audience for whom it is written (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022). Numerous previous scholars (i.e., Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Manchon & Matsuda, 2016) defined academic writing as capability of expressing and organizing innovative ideas along with the use of sentences with accuracy to create logical, meaningful and coherent texts and paragraphs. Hyland and Hyland (2006), for example, declared academic writing as context-embedded which can only be understood in collective societal perspective instead of an individual's perspective. Likewise, several other scholars, such as Elsherif, 2012, and Manchon and Matsuda, 2016 consider the learners' ability to search and evaluate relevant academic resources along with express and organize new ideas as fundamentals of academic writing.

Proficiency in academic writing is considered as one of the most requisite and indispensable skills for university students to master worldwide because of its importance in teaching-learning process at higher education level (Al Mubarak, 2017; Khadawardi, 2022). There are a number of different styles of writing i.e., personal writing, general and formal academic writing. Academic writing differs from general writing due to its formal style of writing and structure. It is more objective, concise and impersonal and has its own set of rules and structures. Numerous scholars defined academic writing differently, for instance, Al Fadda (2012) as a mental and cognitive activity, Al Badi (2015) as a complex process while Al-Mukhdad (2019) describes it as one of the most important yet challenging skill for many students.

The above-mentioned diverse viewpoints suggest that academic writing encompasses a range of features that work together in a multifaceted process and need a profound understanding on part of teachers as well as specific skills from students' side (Khadawardi, 2022). Proficiency in academic writing skill offers students opportunity of self-expression and critical thinking during their course at university. There are many important aspects of academic writing i.e., vocabulary, spelling, correct use of grammar, organization of paragraphs in coherent and cohesive manner, paraphrasing, referencing and citations that students should learn and master for precise and accurate writing. Students at university level must be conversant with features, elements and processes of academic writing to become good writers (Hinkel, 2020). Students also should be well acquainted with its types i.e., descriptive, illustrative and narrative academic writing and its approaches as process, genre and product along with strategies used in academic writing as paraphrasing and critical thinking.

Academic writing enables students to socialize into the discourse of subjects and disciplines in universities and plays an indispensable part in learning a foreign language. Al Fadda (2012) asserted that basics of academic writing is to enable students to develop their own voices. Al Fadda (2012) further stated that it is possible through the ability to access and evaluate the references in order to put the different ideas and opinions together. Writing in the same vein, Al Fadda (2012) pointed out that learners have to be familiar with punctuation marks i.e., the capitalization, period, colon, semicolon, comma, hyphen and dash etc. In similar context, McMahan et al. (2016) claimed that the key purposes of academic writing are to express feelings, entertaining, informing and convincing the readers. Several other studies conducted worldwide, however, suggest that majority students find academic writing challenging and difficult. Primary reasons for this inefficiency were students' lack of motivation (Alfaki, 2015); negativities and misconceptions about academic writing along with malpractices of examination system (Ashraf et al., 2020); teachers' use of traditional

teaching strategies (Al-Jaro et al., 2016); and finally lack of reading with less writing practice (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017).

These challenges of academic writing are of great concern and has been noticeably considered by previous scholars. Ashraf et al. (2020) observed that English language learners have to face double pressures: first, writing in English and second, writing in an academic way. A number of previous researchers diagnosed students' lack of vocabulary (i.e., Afzal, 2019; Itua et al., 2012; Mumtaz, 2021; Rahmat, 2019); grammar and spelling mistakes (Altamimi & Rashid, 2019; Farooq et al., 2012; Itua et al., 2012; Nasser, 2019) and low language proficiency as the problematic areas in their academic writing. Numerous other studies found grammar related difficulties (i.e., Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Hasan & Marzuki, 2017; Nasser, 2019) encountered by students during academic writing process. These difficulties include incorrect use of punctuation (Nasser, 2019); weak expressions (Al Mubarak, 2017); errors in using correct verb and use of plague words and phrases (Al Fadda, 2012) and identification of sentence structure and pattern (Nasser, 2019).

Expressing and organizing ideas refer to how paragraphs are written clearly and logically and how words and sentences are put together effectively to deliver accurate ideas. Research findings from previous studies conducted by Al Murshidi (2014) and Mumtaz (2021) reported that students faced problems in the area of expressing and organizing ideas. Other previous scholars identified students' difficulties in generating new ideas (Al Murshidi, 2014) and inability to organize ideas (Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong, 2008). Furthermore, students' inability to paraphrase and summarize passages (Abdulkareem, 2013) have been found to be one of the key academic writing difficulties in previous studies. Insufficient language proficiency, according to Keck (2014) as well as Liao and Tseng (2010) was the main reason behind this academic writing difficulty. Additionally, Asaoka and Usui (2003) found that students consider finding relevant sources, selecting important points, synthesizing information and paraphrasing as the most challenging.

Furthermore, proper and correct use of citation is an essential element of academic writing, yet beginners consider it as a challenge. A number of studies (Abdulkareem, 2013; Atta-Obeng & Lamptey, 2012; Itua et al., 2012; Qasem & Zayid, 2019) concluded that referencing and citation is another difficulty for students at university level. Likewise, Ahmed and Mahboob (2016) identified citation and referencing as one of the serious challenge faced by Pakistani students while writing research proposals. They further pointed out that the lack of supervision and proper guidance is the reason behind these difficulties and suggested improved guiding skills and supervision to overcome these challenges. Al Mubarak (2017) supported these findings and asserted that students face difficulties in picking out relevant academic sources for supporting their writing and need skills about referencing as well. Additionally, De Voss and Rosati (2002) pointed out that issues of plagiarism has become complex and complicated due to students' increasing use of downloading, cutting and pasting techniques.

Previous review of literature pointed out that the command of good writing skills plays an important role in leading learners towards success. Moreover, it is needed to fulfill various academic requirements, for instance, project writing, letter writing, composition, essay writing, articles and theses writing etc. Academic writing, according to Fatimah and Masduqi (2017), has become a norm at higher education level, as graduates are needed to use English language to express themselves effectively. Similarly, Sulisworo et al. (2016) argued that students' academic

writing skill and ability indicates his/her success in teaching-learning process as well as his/her future success. Moreover, Arkoudis and Tran (2007) considers academic writing as a prerequisite for students' academic success in international scenario.

Previous literature further revealed that generally the students and teachers' views about academic writing difficulties across the globe were almost analogous. It is also evident from review of literature that problems contributing to academic writing challenges are diverse and complex and should, therefore, be conceptualized in a broader sense. In the light of above mentioned contextual situation, researchers primarily focused on investigating the views of Pakistani university students about the difficulties they encounter in academic writing process. This study may set a stage for future scholars to be familiar with the research related to students' academic writing difficulties in Pakistani context. This study is also significant because its findings has the potential to improve Pakistani students' academic writing skills.

Following three research questions were specifically formulated to achieve the main objective. What is students' perception of academic writing difficulties at university level? Are there any gender-based differences in university students' perceived academic writing difficulties? Are there any discipline-based differences in university students' perceived academic writing difficulties?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design, Population and Sample**

This study used quantitative survey design to achieve the main objective. This design deals with quantifying and analyzing variables to reach the conclusions (Apuke, 2017). This design employs strategies of investigation i.e., surveys to collect data on pre-determined tools and provides numerical data (Creswell, 2003). All the male and female students enrolled at M. Phil level in three universities (1 public and 2 private) of Multan served as the population in the present study. The sample of this study included 442 students (87 males and 355 female), aged 22-45, taken from five departments that were present/functional in all the three universities. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size formula was followed to select the representative sample from the diverse nature of population using stratified random sampling technique.

### **Tool Development and Data Collection**

The Academic Writing Difficulties Questionnaire [AWDQ] developed and validated by researchers themselves was used to analyze essential aspects of university student' perception of academic writing difficulties. The Academic Writing Difficulties Questionnaire [AWDQ] used in this study was constructed after thorough review of literature. The AWDQ comprised 36 items and assessed three essential dimensions of students' academic writing difficulties. The AWDQ was further organized into three sub-scales including difficulties related to vocabulary/spelling dimension with 07 items, difficulties related to grammar with 11 items and difficulties related to expressing/organizing ideas having 18 items. University students were required to respond on five response options from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree = 5.

A panel of relevant experts was asked to provide expert opinion and feedback to validate the questionnaire. Researchers noted and incorporated the valuable suggestions of the experts. Questionnaire was further improved by conducting a small scale pilot study. The pilot study

involved 13 male and 7 female university students who were enrolled in different departments of sample universities. Researchers discussed appropriateness and acceptability of all the items in all the three subscales of the AWDQ with university students who participated in pilot study and noted their valuable suggestions. The AWDQ was finalized for collecting data from sample university students keeping in view the valuable suggestions of pilot study participants. Cronbach Alpha coefficient value calculated for the whole scale was found to be 0.93.

Before data collection, researchers sought permission from the registrar office of the university, relevant head of department and the concerned class teachers. One of the members of the research team administered the final copy of the AWDQ to the respondents personally during their class hours after seeking informed consent. Finally, 442 valid questionnaires were collected back from students of five departments and used for analysis.

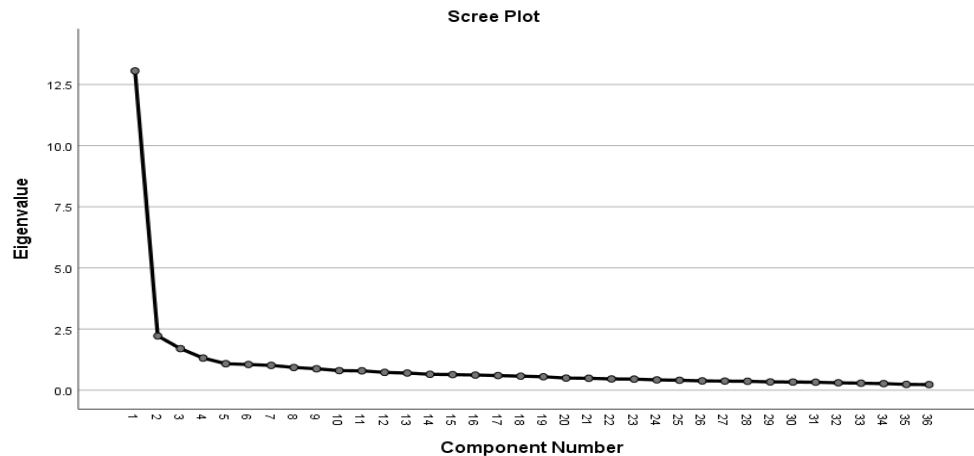
### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Researchers performed following three types of statistical tests to analyze quantitative data. First, factor analysis was executed to analyze construct validity of the self-developed Academic Writing Difficulties Questionnaire [AWDQ] using Varimax rotation method with Kaiser Normalization. Second, descriptive statistics was performed to examine university students' perception of their academic writing difficulties. Finally, gender-based and discipline-based differences between students' views were measured using Independent-samples t-test and ANOVA statistics. Results are displayed in subsequent sections.

#### **Factor Analysis**

To examine construct validity of the 36 items of AWDQ, principal components analysis (PCA) followed by Varimax rotation was performed. Before executing PCA, data fitness for factor analysis was assessed. Review of the correlation matrix pointed to the fact that majority of the coefficients were above 0.30. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy was higher (i.e., .94) as compared to recommended value (i.e., .60). Likewise, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also found to be statistical significant ( $p=0.000$ ). Community values were above .40 which indicated fitness of all the items with each other in the corresponding component. The factorability of the correlation matrix was, thus, supported by these initial findings.

PCA exhibited seven components with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 36.3%, 6.2%, 4.7%, 3.7%, 3.0%, 2.9%, and 2.8% of the corresponding variance. A concentrated examination of the scree plot (Figure 1) pointed to a clear break after the second component. Consequently, a one-component solution was considered fitting for the data collected through AWDQ. The one component recognized by the PCA had eigenvalue of 13.05 and accounted for more than 36.3% of the total variance.

**Figure 1***Scree plot for the AWDQ*

This analysis used .50 as cutoff value for factor loading. All the 36 items of AWDQ loaded on factor 1. Majority items i.e., 34 out of total 36 items were with factor loadings above .50 and only two items (i.e., item 31 and item 34) were with factor loadings slightly below .50 (i.e., .49 and .48). Results obviously indicated that all the items of AWDQ loaded on factor 1. This means that the AWDQ is one-dimensional, and this one-factor model fits this data set very well. These findings of the PCA, thus, supported the use of the AWDQ as a valid tool to analyze university students' perception of their academic writing difficulties. Furthermore, all the items of AWDQ were positively correlated with each other and statistically significant as well. Reliability of the questionnaire was .93. The overall pattern of results also provide support for the reliability of AWDQ items for analyzing university students' perception of their academic writing difficulties.

### Descriptive Statistics for Students' Perceived Academic Writing Difficulties

Students' perspectives about their academic writing difficulties were analyzed performing descriptive statistics i.e., percentages, mean score and SD. Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 demonstrate the results.

**Table 1**

Students' perceived academic writing difficulties related to vocabulary/spelling

Sr. no.	Statement/theme	Agree %	Neutra 1%	Disagree %	Mean	SD
1	limited vocabulary	70.2	9.0	20.8	3.59	1.02
2	Complicated vocabulary and terminology	70.0	11.3	18.7	3.62	0.98
3	Difficulty in choosing suitable vocabulary	59.0	16.3	24.7	3.43	1.05
4	Confusion due to lack of vocabulary	63.0	15.0	22.0	3.50	1.08
5	Spelling mistakes	40.0	18.1	42.0	2.89	1.20
6	Difficulty in using new vocabularies	55.4	17.2	27.4	3.35	1.13
7	Difficulty in checking spellings of new words	50.2	20.0	30.0	3.26	1.15
<b>Overall Perception</b>					<b>3.38</b>	<b>1.09</b>

Table 1 reveals descriptive analysis of university students' responses about their academic writing difficulties related to vocabulary and spelling. Table 2 further demonstrated the range of mean scores (i.e., 2.89 to 3.62) on all the seven items included in this subscale related to vocabulary and spelling. Item five i.e., 'making spelling mistakes in writing' had the lowest mean value (i.e., 2.89) while item two 'complicated vocabulary and terminology' with mean score 3.62 considered as highest among all the seven items of this subscale related to vocabulary and spelling. Similarly, analysis in Table 2 also portrayed mean values for the other five items of this factor.

Analysis in Table 1 further exhibit that majority six items were with mean score above mid-point (i.e., 3.00). This result statistically put forward that majority of university graduates believed that they face academic writing difficulties in these six areas related to vocabulary and spelling. The mean value (2.89) on one item i.e., making spelling mistakes' is indicative of lower level of students' perceived academic writing difficulties in this area. The overall mean value of 3.38 also exhibits that university students face academic writing difficulties in this area related to vocabulary and spelling. Overall, it can be inferred that university students believed with a good level of consensus that they face academic writing difficulties in this area related to vocabulary and spelling.

**Table 2**

Students' perceived academic writing difficulties related to grammar

Sr. no.	Statement/theme	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Mean	SD
1	I face grammatical problems while writing.	58.1	14.3	27.6	3.36	1.13
2	Difficulty in distinguishing parts of speech.	42.0	18.0	40.0	2.96	1.14
3	Differentiating between phrase and sentence.	39.0	17.0	44.0	2.90	1.11
4	Developing writing sentences.	40.3	18.3	41.4	2.94	1.13
5	Writing logically related sentences.	47.0	18.0	35.0	3.12	1.10
6	Writing a paragraph in an accepted manner.	40.0	21.5	38.5	2.99	1.10
7	Correct use of tenses	48.0	17.0	35.0	3.12	1.18
8	Using passive voice in writing.	45.0	18.0	37.0	3.04	1.14
9	Putting the correct punctuation mark	38.5	19.0	42.5	2.88	1.16
10	Forget to capitalize where required	32.6	13.1	54.3	2.59	1.23
11	Put correct tenses appropriate to the event.	46.6	19.3	34.1	3.12	1.54
<b>Overall Perception</b>					<b>3.00</b>	<b>1.18</b>

Table 2 reveals descriptive analysis of university students' responses about their academic writing difficulties related to grammar subscale. Table 2 further demonstrated the range of mean scores (i.e., 2.59 to 3.36) on all the eleven items included in grammar subscale. Item ten i.e., 'capitalizing the first letter of proper noun' had the lowest mean value (i.e., 2.59) while item one 'facing general grammatical problems' with mean score 3.36 considered as highest among all the eleven items of this grammar related subscale. Similarly, analysis in Table 2 also portrayed mean values for the other nine items of this factor.

Analysis in Table 2 further exhibit that five items were with mean score above mid-point (i.e., 3.00). This result statistically put forward that majority of university graduates believed that they face academic writing difficulties in these five areas related to grammar. The mean values below the mid-point (i.e., 3.00) are indicative of the lower level of students' perceived academic writing

difficulties in other six areas. The overall mean value of 3.00 also exhibits that university students academic writing difficulties in this area of grammar are relatively low as compared to the difficulties in the area related to vocabulary and spelling. Overall, it can be inferred that university students believed with a moderate level of consensus that they face not as much of academic writing difficulties in this area related to grammar.

**Table 3**

Students' perceived academic writing difficulties related to expressing/organizing ideas

Sr. no.	Statement/theme	Agree %	Neutra l%	Disagree %	Mea n	SD
1	I have problems in academic writing.	53.0	20.0	27.0	3.29	1.06
2	Structure of academic writing is complex.	60.0	19.0	21.0	3.48	0.98
3	Lack of sufficient ideas	51.0	19.0	30.0	3.24	1.10
4	I don't know how to start a paragraph.	40.0	20.0	40.0	2.98	1.13
5	Making outline before the start of writing.	43.2	20.6	36.2	3.10	1.10
6	Paraphrasing other writers' ideas	49.5	19.2	31.3	3.23	1.10
7	Organizing ideas in a clear way.	50.0	19.0	31.0	3.23	1.10
8	Achieving coherence and cohesion	53.0	20.0	27.0	3.30	1.06
9	Clearly expressing my ideas in writing.	45.0	18.6	36.4	3.11	1.00
10	Relating ideas within a paragraph.	43.2	20.6	36.2	3.09	1.12
11	Relating paragraph to paragraph ideas	48.0	19.5	32.5	3.18	1.10
12	Balance between my own and others' views	50.0	18.0	32.0	3.22	1.09
13	Correct style of citations and referencing	60.0	19.0	21.0	3.44	1.02
14	Make end of the text 'reference list'	54.0	18.0	28.0	3.31	1.08
15	Writing within text 'reference' correctly.	51.0	19.0	30.0	3.23	1.11
16	Time to match teachers' expectations	62.0	17.0	21.0	3.50	1.02
17	Difficulty in analytical writing	57.4	19.0	23.6	3.42	1.06
18	Difficulty in convincing the readers	52.0	21.0	27.0	3.28	1.06
<b>Overall Perception</b>					<b>3.26</b>	<b>1.07</b>

Table 3 reveals descriptive analysis of university students' responses about their academic writing difficulties related to expressing and organizing ideas. Table 3 further demonstrated the range of mean scores (i.e., 2.98 to 3.50) on all the eighteen items included in this subscale. Item four i.e., 'I don't know how to start a paragraph' had the lowest mean value (i.e., 2.98) while item sixteen 'time to match teachers expectations' with mean score 3.50 considered as highest among all the eighteen items of this subscale related to vocabulary and spelling. Similarly, analysis in Table 3 also portrayed mean values for the other sixteen items of this factor which range from 3.09 to 3.48.

Analysis in Table 3 further exhibit that seventeen items were with mean score above mid-point (i.e., 3.00). This result statistically put forward that majority of university graduates believed that they face academic writing difficulties in these seventeen areas related to expressing and organizing ideas. The mean value (2.98) on one item i.e., 'I don't know how to start a paragraph' is indicative of lower level of students' perceived academic writing difficulties in this area. The overall mean value of 3.26 also exhibits that university students face academic writing difficulties in this area related to expressing and organizing ideas. Overall, it can be concluded that university students believed with a good level of consensus that they face academic writing difficulties in this area related to expressing and organizing ideas.



### Inferential Statistics to Analyze Significance of Differences

Gender-based and discipline-based differences between students' views were measured using Independent-samples t-test and ANOVA statistics. Table 4 and Table 5 display the results.

**Table 4**

Gender-based differences in students' perception of academic writing difficulties

Sub-scale/Scale	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.
Vocabulary related Difficulties	Male	87	23.46	5.45	440	.388	.698
	Female	355	23.72	5.60			
Grammar related Difficulties	Male	87	31.11	8.81	440	2.31	.021
	Female	355	33.54	8.78			
Expressing and Organizing ideas	Male	87	56.53	14.21	440	1.83	.069
	Female	355	59.23	11.89			
Overall Scale	Male	87	111.10	25.17	440	1.90	.058
	Female	355	116.49	23.39			

Table 4 displays gender-based comparison of university students' views about three sub-scales related to academic writing difficulties along with overall differences on the whole scale designed for identifying students' academic writing difficulties. The signature-values for two out of three subscales related to academic writing difficulties along with overall scale scores were (sig= .698, .069, .058) more than .05, which reveals statistically insignificant differences in university students' gender-based perception of academic writing difficulties in these two areas as well as the whole scale scores. It can, thus, be inferred (from mean values and p-values), that there is no significant difference in male and female university students' perception of academic writing difficulties regarding vocabulary and expression of ideas as well as overall scale and their views are almost equal in these areas. Mean values on expressing and organizing ideas, however, indicate that the female students (Mean = 59.23) consider extent of academic writing difficulties relatively higher than the male students (Mean= 56.53). The signature-value (.021), however, for the one subscale i.e., 'grammar related difficulties' was less than .05, which reveals statistically significant differences in male and female students' perception of grammar related difficulties.

**Table 5**

Discipline-based differences in students' perception of academic writing difficulties

Sub-scale/Scale		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Vocabulary related Difficulties	Between Groups	220.394	4	55.098	1.790	.130
	Within Groups	13453.717	437	30.787		
	Total	13674.111	441			
Grammar related Difficulties	Between Groups	925.647	4	231.412	3.023	.018
	Within Groups	33447.450	437	76.539		
	Total	34373.097	441			
Expressing and	Between Groups	3157.233	4	789.308	5.321	.000

Organizing ideas	Within Groups	64827.346	437	148.346		
	Total	67984.579	441			
Overall Scale	Between Groups	9351.545	4	2337.886		
	Within Groups	240779.053	437	550.982	4.243	.002
	Total	250130.597	441			

The discipline-based results of data analysis in Table 5 show that university students differed significantly in their perception of academic writing difficulties in two out of three subscales along with the whole scale scores. Statistically significant differences were found in three categories i.e., grammar related difficulties (sig.= .018), expressing and organizing ideas (sig.= .000) and overall scale scores (sig.= .002). The signature-value (.130), however, for the one subscale i.e., 'vocabulary related difficulties' was more than .05, which reveals statistically insignificant differences in students' discipline-based perception of vocabulary related difficulties.

## DISCUSSION

Researchers primarily conducted this study to analyze university students' views about their academic writing difficulties specifically related to vocabulary/spelling, grammar, along with expressing and organizing their ideas. On the basis of university students' views, the findings of this study pointed out that the most difficult aspect they come across during academic writing process is limited and complicated vocabulary/terminology, difficulty in choosing suitable vocabulary and academic words. These findings are consistent with a number of previous studies (i.e., Al Mubarak, 2017; Aldabbus, 2017) as they mentioned almost same academic writing issues of students in different contexts. This may possibly be owing to the dearth of academic words/vocabulary that university students know and practice in their writing.

Difficulty in organizing ideas i.e., lack of sufficient ideas, complex structure of academic writing, organizing ideas in a clear way and relating ideas within a paragraph were found to be the second biggest challenge university students encounter while writing for academic purpose. This may possibly be owing to the fact that university students did not hold sufficient background knowledge, training and practice about the skill of organizing ideas related to a specific topic and lack of training/practice in making clear outline before the start of writing. Additionally, the results revealed that summarizing and paraphrasing other sources/writers' ideas was the most challenging aspect encountered by university students in academic writing process along with difficulty in analytical writing. These findings were found to be corresponding to what was concluded by previous research scholars (i.e., Alsamdani, 2010). They also confirmed that summarizing and paraphrasing other writers' ideas as well as writing critically were two most important academic writing difficulties that university students have to face in academic writing.

Alternatively, these study findings demonstrated that university students have to face little or no challenges in using grammar and mechanics of writing for example distinguishing parts of speech, differentiating between phrase and sentence, putting the correct punctuation marks and capitalization. These findings are in contrast with several previous studies (i.e., Al Mubarak, 2017; AbdulKareem, 2013; Al Fadda, 2012). They concluded that writing mechanics and grammar related difficulties were the most important problems that affect the quality of students' academic writing. Possibly the categories of challenges encountered by university students in academic writing reflect

the teaching approaches used by their teachers which focus mainly on accuracy instead of academic writing process.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of university students' responses revealed that they face academic writing difficulties in all the areas i.e., vocabulary and spelling, grammar as well as expressing and organizing ideas but with varied extent. It was further concluded from analysis of students' views that there was no statistically significant differences in male and female university students' perception of academic writing difficulties regarding vocabulary and expression of ideas as well as overall scale but statistically significant difference was found in the area of grammar related difficulties. Another notable conclusion was that statistically there was not a significant difference in public and private university students' perception of academic writing difficulties and their views are almost equal in all the areas. It was further concluded that university students differed significantly in their perception of academic writing difficulties in two out of three subscales, along with the whole scale scores, i.e., grammar related difficulties, expressing and organizing ideas, along with an overall scale scores. On the basis of the findings of this study, it is recommended that teachers as well as universities need to focus on improving students' abilities in weak areas of academic writing.

## References:

- Abdulkareem, M. N. (2013). An investigation study of academic writing problems faced by Arab postgraduate students at University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(9), 1552-57.
- Afzal, N. (2019). A study on vocabulary-learning problems encountered by BA English majors at the university level of Education. *Arab World English Journal(AWEJ)*, 10(3), 81-98.
- Ahmed, F. & Mahboob, U. (2016). Analysis of research proposals and challenges faced by postgraduate trainees in internal medicine and allied disciplines during fellowship training program: A qualitative study. *Khyber Medical University Journal*, 8(2) 82-87.
- Al Badi, I. (2015). *Academic writing difficulties of ESL learners*. In the 2015 WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings. Spain, Barcelona
- Aldabbus, S. (2017). Challenges faced by some foundation students at Bahrain teachers college in acquiring reading and writing skills. *International Journal of Pedagogical Innovations*, 5(2), 123-31.
- Aldabbus, S., & Almansouri, E. (2022). Academic writing difficulties encountered by university EFL learners. *British Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(3), 1-11.
- Al Fadda, H. (2012). Difficulties in academic writing: From the perspective of King Saud university postgraduate students. *English Language Teaching*, 5(3), 123-30.
- Alfaki, I. (2015). University students' English writing problems: Diagnosis and remedy. *International Journal of English language Teaching* 3(3), 40-52.
- Al-Jaro, M. S., Al-Quiadhi, A. M., & Ramadhan, K. Y. (2016). The effect of prewriting techniques on Yemeni EFL tertiary learners' writing skills. *Academic Journal*, 112-26.
- Al Mubarak, A. A. (2017). An investigation of academic writing problems level faced by undergraduate students at Al Imam Al Mahdi university - Sudan. *Journal of English Education*, 5(2), 175-88.

- Al-Mukhdad, S. (2019). Investigating English academic writing problems encountered by Arab International University students. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(3), 300-06.
- Al Murshidi, G. (2014). UAE university male students' interests impact on reading and writing performance and improvement. *English Language Teaching*, 7(9), 57-63.
- Alsamdani, H.A. (2010). The relationship between Saudi EFL students writing competence, L1 writing proficiency, and self-regulation. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 16(1), 53-63.
- Altamimi, D., & Rashid, R. A. (2019). Spelling problems and causes among Saudi English language undergraduates. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 10(3), 178-91.
- Apuke, O. D. (2017). Quantitative research methods: A synopsis approach. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Kuwait chapter)*, 6(11), 40-47.
- Ariyanti, A. & Fitriana, R. (2017). EFL students' difficulties and needs in essay writing. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities (ASSEHR)*, 158, 111-21.
- Asaoka, C. & Usui, Y. (2003). Students' perceived problems in an EAP writing course. *JALT Journal*, 25(2), 143-72.
- Ashraf, M., Rubab, I., & Ajmal, M. (2020). Investigating the problems of organization and vocabulary in academic writing encountered by students at postgraduate level. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(8), 2766-79.
- Arkoudis, S., & Tran, L.T. (2007). International students in Australia: Read ten thousand volumes of books and walk ten thousand miles. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 27(2), 157-69.
- Atta-obeng, H., & Lamptey, R.B. (2012). Challenges with reference citation among postgraduate students at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Kumasi, Ghana. *Journal of Science and Technology*, 32(3), 69-80.
- Belkhir, A., & Benyelles, R. (2017). Identifying EFL learners essay writing difficulties and sources: A move towards solution the case of second year EFL learners at Tlemcen university. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 16(6), 80-88.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- De Voss, D. & Rosati, A. (2002). It wasn't me, was it? Plagiarism and the web. *Computer and Composition*, 19(2), 191-203.
- Elsherif, E. (2012). *L2 Academic writing difficulties and tutors' written feedback (1<sup>st</sup> Edition)*. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.
- Farooq, M. S., Uzair-Ul-Hassan, M., & Wahid, S. (2012). Opinion of second language learners about writing difficulties in English language. *South Asian Studies*, 27(1), 183-94.
- Fatimah, F., & Masduqi, H. (2017). Research trends in EFL writing in Indonesia: Where art thou? *Journal of Teaching and Education*, 7(1), 89-98.
- Hasan, J., & Marzuki, M. (2017). An analysis of student's ability in writing at Riau University Pekanbaru. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 7(5), 380-88.
- Hinkel, E. (2020). Teaching academic ESL writing: Practical techniques in vocabulary and grammar. In *Teaching Academic L2 Writing: Practical Techniques in Vocabulary and Grammar* (2nd Edition). Routledge Taylor & Francis.
- Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues*. Cambridge University Press.

- Itua, I. Coffey, M. Merryweather, D. Norton, L., & Foxcroft, A. (2012). Exploring barriers and solutions to academic writing: Perspectives from students, higher education and further education tutors. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 38*(3), 305-26.
- Khadawardi, H. A. (2022). Saudi learners' perceptions of academic writing challenges and general attitude towards writing in English. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 13*(3), 645-58.
- Keck, C. (2014). Copying, paraphrasing, and academic writing development: A reexamination of L1 and L2 summarization practices. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 25*, 4-22.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30*, 607-10.
- Liao, M., & Tseng, C. (2010). Students' behaviors and views of paraphrasing. *Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics, 14*(2), 187-211.
- McMahan, E., Funk, R., Day, S. X., & Coleman, L. (2016). *Literature and the writing process*. Pearson.
- Manchon, R., & Matsuda, P. (2016). *Handbook of second and foreign language writing (1<sup>st</sup> Edition)*. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data.
- Mumtaz, S. N. (2021). Academic writing challenges of foreign language learners in Pakistan. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences, 8*(2), 97-103.
- Nasser, S. M. (2019). Iraqi EFL students' difficulties in writing composition: An experimental study. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 9*(1), 178-84.
- Qasem, A. A.F., & Zayid, M.I.E. (2019). The challenges and problems faced by students in the early stage of writing research projects in L2, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia. *European Journal of Special Education Research, 4*(1), 32-47.
- Rahmat, H.N. (2019). Problems with rhetorical problems among academic writers. *American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 4*(4), 506-15.
- Sattayatham, A. & Rarranapinyowong, P. (2008). Analysis of errors in paragraph writing in English by first year medical students from the four medical schools at Mahidol University. *Silpakorn University International Journal, 8*, 17-38.
- Sulisworo, D., Rahayu, T., & Akhsan, R. N. (2016). The students' academic writing skill after implementing blended learning using Facebook. *International Technologies and Learning Tools, 56*(6), 176-91.

Date of Publication	June 08, 2023
---------------------	---------------