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Key Obstacles in L2 Academic Writing Faced by Saudi English Major Students

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Abstract

Academic writing is a vital skill for university students (Hyland, 2022), but it can be a daunting task to master. It is crucial to understand the specific challenges and, more importantly, the root causes of these challenges in order to overcome them. The main objectives of this mixed methods study are to investigate the challenges of academic writing and to explore the factors that contribute to these challenges. To achieve these objectives, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with four senior-year students in the English department, and a questionnaire was distributed among 33 English-majored students to investigate their general L2 academic writing attitude and whether it has a correlation with the difficulty they encounter with L2 academic writing. The results indicated that students face difficulties in several areas: (1) thinking about thesis, (2) writing introduction and conclusion, (3) writing an error-free sentences, (4) using transitional phrases, (5) difficulty regarding writing mechanism. The major reasons behind that are: (A) the assigned lecturer and poor implementation of the technology, (B) the students' educational background, (c) the students' negative attitude toward L2 academic writing. Furthermore, students' responses showed a great welcoming to the technology involvement inside the classroom and that would probably assist in reducing some challenges if it was implemented effectively.

Keywords: *Academic Writing; L2 Challenges; EFL students; Attitude toward Academic Writing Saudi students Writing*

INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is undergoing rapid growth and development, with a commitment to enhancing education and language instruction. English is pivotal in global communication and academia, and Saudi universities have introduced a Bachelor of Arts program to equip students with comprehensive language skills. These programs cater to the global landscape, ensuring graduates have a robust command of English. In addition, Saudi universities have established English departments to nurture linguistic aptitude and foster international discourse. This holistic approach to language education encompasses language acquisition, literature, linguistics, and

cultural studies. Saudi Arabia's strategic emphasis on English education is indicative of its foresight in aligning with global trends and fostering a globally competitive workforce. (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018).

L2 academic writing is an essential skill for university students (Hyland, 2022). It is a productive skill that allows students to engage in critical thinking, organize their ideas, and use language precisely. Saudi students face a number of challenges in L2 academic writing, but these challenges can be overcome through the use of effective pedagogical strategies and comprehensive support mechanisms. Educators can help students develop their L2 academic writing skills by providing them with ample practice opportunities, giving them astute feedback, and guiding them in identifying and correcting linguistic inaccuracies. They can also integrate technological tools to further augment students' writing acumen (Yangın-Ekşi, et al. 2023). However, L2 academic writing is a complex and demanding skill that requires students to have a strong command of grammar and mechanics, as well as the ability to think critically and organize their thoughts effectively. In addition, students often face challenges in terms of their attitude towards L2 academic writing, as well as the quality of instruction they receive.

Saudi undergraduate students face challenges in L2 academic writing, such as forming error-free sentences, writing short paragraphs, and expressing and discussing their opinions (Alharbi, 2019; Khadawardi, 2022). These challenges can be attributed to their educational backgrounds, personal motivation, and the current formal education system as have been found in other contexts (Yang, et al., 2019; Zhang, & Zhang, 2023). Interventions such as providing more opportunities to practice writing, giving feedback, and developing critical thinking skills can help students overcome these challenges. Specifically, students with different educational backgrounds may have different levels of English proficiency and experience with writing in English. Students with more teacher-directed learning experiences may find it difficult to adapt to the more independent demands of university-level L2 academic writing. Students with low personal motivation may be less likely to put in the effort required to succeed in L2 academic writing. To address these challenges, teachers can provide more opportunities for students to practice writing, give them feedback on their writing, and help them develop their critical thinking skills. Additionally, teachers can create a more student-centered learning environment that encourages students to take ownership of their learning and to develop their own ideas.

Saudi students' English writing skills are subpar, according to a study by Al-Nafjan and Alhawsawi (2022). They scored the lowest on the IELTS and TOEFL exams, with mean scores of 4.71 and 19, respectively. This is concerning given the country's large education budget. Al-Nafjan and Alhawsawi (2022) stated that in the 2021 IELTS report, Saudi Arabia had the lowest mean score in the General Training writing section and the Academic writing section, only outperforming other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. In the 2021 TOEFL Data Summary, Saudi Arabia had one of the lowest writing scores, only better than Yemen. This is in contrast to the country's high education budget.

This study will investigate the challenges of L2 academic writing for university English-major students in Saudi Arabia. The study will use both quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data: semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The quantitative data will be used to identify the most common challenges that students face, while the qualitative data will be used to understand the underlying reasons for these challenges. The study will provide a better understanding of the challenges of L2 academic writing for university English-major students in Saudi Arabia. It will identify the most effective interventions for addressing these challenges. It will inform the development of more effective L2 academic writing instruction for university

students in Saudi Arabia. The study is important because L2 academic writing is a critical skill for success in university and beyond. By understanding the challenges that students face in L2 academic writing, we can develop more effective interventions to help them succeed.

Conceptualizing Writing in ELT

Writing is a vital skill for language development, as it allows us to communicate our thoughts and ideas in a clear and concise way. It is also a way of expressing ourselves creatively and sharing our experiences with others. Writing can be used for a variety of purposes, such as to inform, persuade, entertain, or simply to connect with others (Ferris, & Hedgcock, 2023). Academic writing is a formal type of writing that is used in academic settings. It is characterized by its use of clear and concise language, as well as its adherence to specific conventions of grammar and style. Academic writing is often used to present research findings, to argue a point of view, or to analyze a text (Morton et al., 2015). Academic writing is an essential skill for students at all levels of education. It is required for completing assignments, writing essays, and preparing for exams (Matsuda, 2021). In addition, academic writing is a valuable skill for professionals in a variety of fields. For example, scientists, lawyers, and doctors all need to be able to write effectively in order to communicate their ideas to others.

Academic writing can be a challenging task for many students. Some of the common challenges of academic writing include: Grammar and mechanics (Truscott, 1996). Academic writing requires a strong command of grammar and mechanics. Students must be able to use correct punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure in their writing (Kyle, & Crossley, 2018). Academic writing must be well-organized. Students must be able to develop a clear thesis statement and support it with evidence from their research. Academic writing has a specific style that is different from other types of writing (Hyland, 2022). Students must be able to use formal language and avoid informal expressions. Academic writing assignments are often long and require a lot of research. Students must be able to manage their time effectively and stay on track with their writing (Hyland, 2022). Moreover, some students may find academic writing to be boring or tedious. This can make it difficult to stay motivated and complete assignments (Csizér, & Tankó, 2017).

There are a number of factors that can contribute to academic writing difficulty. Students who lack prior knowledge of the topic they are writing about may find it difficult to write effectively (Proske, & Kapp, 2013). Students who are not motivated to write may find it difficult to complete assignments (Csizér, & Tankó, 2017). Students who have a negative attitude towards writing may find it difficult to engage in the process (Yu, et al., 2021). Students who have poor writing skills may find it difficult to produce high-quality work (Hyland, 2022). Students who do not receive feedback on their writing may not be able to improve their skills (Crosthwaite, et al., 2022; Miao, et al., 2023)). So, academic writing is a complex and challenging skill, but it is an essential skill for students and professionals alike. By understanding the challenges of academic writing and the factors that contribute to it, students can develop strategies for overcoming these challenges and producing high-quality work.

Sun and Lan's (2023) investigation discovered a consistent exploration of teacher education within the realm of L2 writing research across the previous four decades. Nonetheless, upon meticulous scrutiny of the outcomes, it becomes apparent that only a limited number of studies have delved into this subject matter from a transdisciplinary standpoint (Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Matsuda, 2021). Matsuda et al. (2013) contended that a considerable portion of L2 writing courses are instructed by educators possessing varying academic backgrounds, including rhetoric and composition, creative writing, applied linguistics, TESOL, SLA, and literature. Despite this, these

educators often lack adequate preparation to effectively address the specific challenges encountered by L2 writers, such as: the imperative for increased dedication of time and attention from educators, the perception that issues related to L2 writing extend beyond the scope of first-year composition courses, the restricted availability of opportunities for comprehensive professional training, and the insufficiency of instructional materials tailored to suit L2 writers (Matsuda et al., 2013). Further research into L2 writing teacher education is warranted, particularly adopting a transdisciplinary lens, to empower educators with the capacity and sensitivity essential to navigate the progressively diverse contexts of L2 writing teaching and learning (Matsuda et al., 2013).

Swales and Feak (2023) explored the evolution of tasks in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing materials, focusing on written commentaries on non-verbal material such as tables and graphs. They found that tasks in EAP writing materials have evolved from being primarily focused on information transfer to being more focused on critical analysis. This evolution reflects the increasing demands of academic writing in the 21st century. Tasks that require students to critically analyze non-verbal material are particularly important for EAP students.

Significance of the Study

The current study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on L2 academic writing in Saudi Arabia by providing insights into the challenges that EFL learners face in this area. The study also identifies the factors that contribute to these challenges, which can inform the development of more effective teaching and learning practices. The study is significant for a number of reasons. First, it provides much-needed insights into the challenges that Saudi EFL learners face in L2 academic writing. Second, the findings of the study can inform the development of more effective teaching and learning practices in this area. Third, the study provides an overview of the students' attitude toward academic writing, which can be beneficial for future learning and teaching experiences (Alhamami, 2022).

METHOD

Research Design

The research was carried out within the Department of English at a School of Languages and Translation. This department features an undergraduate Bachelor of Arts in English program, along with multiple postgraduate courses focused on applied linguistics and translation studies. All study participants were actively enrolled in the undergraduate BA in English curriculum. Structured as a four-year program, the BA in English aims to equip students with a robust grounding in English language proficiencies, literary understanding, and linguistics. The curriculum starts by intensively targeting foundational language competencies, encompassing areas such as phonetics, phonology, grammar, reading comprehension, and elementary writing skills. As students advance through the program, they cultivate sophisticated skills in academic reading, writing, vocabulary enrichment, and nuanced literary analysis.

In the more advanced stages of the program, there is a pronounced emphasis on applied linguistics, featuring coursework in areas such as general linguistics, morphology, syntax, and advanced phonology. Practical modules, including speech workshops, technology-integrated language learning, and specialized writing courses, are also integrated into the curriculum. Moreover, the program offers a diverse literary scope, allowing students to delve into various genres such as short stories, dramas, poems, and novels. The program's final stages are characterized by a strong concentration on research methodologies and translation studies, incorporating courses on research techniques, preparation for global language assessments, and

the practice of translation. Through this synergistic blend of practical and theoretical coursework, the program readies students for a broad spectrum of career paths, ranging from teaching and translation to research and other professions requiring advanced language proficiencies.

Participants

Interview participants: The study interviewed four female students who were enrolled in the English language department at a Saudi public University. The participants were all in their senior year, and they were selected using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a method of sampling where participants are asked to recommend other potential participants. The researcher chose to interview senior year students because they have had more experience with academic writing than students in earlier years.

Questionnaire participants: The study also surveyed 33 English-majored students at Saudi University. The survey participants were asked about their attitudes towards academic writing.

Data Collection Procedures

This paper used mixed method data instruments to gather the information needed, qualitative, semi-structure interview as well as an adapted questionnaire. The questions of the interview were developed by the researchers to identify the general issues regarding academic writing, and the contributory factors to these issues. The researchers elaborated the aim of the interview, then initiated the interview. There are three main aspects to be asked about, firstly, the major difficulties they encounter with academic writing. Secondly, the educational background, and finally, the current teaching methodology in the university that participants attend. The interview was conducted online, within roughly via WhatsApp application and the language used was Arabic. Students' mother tongue was used in order to help participants express their views and opinions without language barriers. Interview instrument has been utilized because it is flexible, and highly structured and the interviewee tends to be more open and relief and can provide more information without any limitation. However, the interview was validated by conducting pilot interview that the researcher determined thereafter which questions were not clear enough for the participants, and which questions were wrongly understood.

Regarding the questionnaire, the researchers adopted Podsén's (1997) questionnaire items that mainly examines the general academic writing attitude. Podsén's survey is a reliable tool that have been used by several researchers to examine students' academic writing attitudes (e.g., Ansarimoghaddam & Tan, 2014; Khadawardi, 2022; Setyowati & Sukmawan; 2016) However, The researchers added several statements and ensured its validity through conducting a pilot study. The questionnaire, however, includes only close-ended items with five Likert scale responses, 1- (*strongly agree*), 2- (*agree*), 3- (*neutral*), 4- (*disagree*), 5- (*strongly disagree*). The questionnaire was online using Google Forms platform. It was distributed among students in WhatsApp application using the target populations WhatsApp groups. The time needed to answer all questions is seven to ten minutes.

Data Analysis

The interview was transcribed to get an actual experience and so, it was verified to get a clear and direct answers. It is worth mentioning that the transcripts were sent to the participants to recheck their answers and to add any necessary information. it was also translated from English into Arabic. The thematic analysis was adapted, this approach was described by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in which the researchers can identify patterns and meaning in the qualitative data. After transcribing the data and the information, the common patterns and the meanings that are

significant and dominant were observed and highlighted so the codes created by the researchers were placed in different excerpts. Right after that, the researchers grouped these codes into themes, the themes describe the topic area, they are complex and meaningful. Next, the themes and the codes were evaluated and revised, the unnecessary themes or\and do not have enough data and do not serve the research objective were deleted. Last step was writing the final narrative. Regarding the questionnaire, each statement contains five categories, these categories are 1- (*strongly agree*), 2- (*agree*), 3- (*neutral*), 4- (*disagree*), 5- (*strongly disagree*) as mentioned earlier. After submitting the survey, Google Forms illustrated the percentage of the responses in each category.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data that has obtained from the interview is presented first. The first researcher interviewed four English language majored female students from a Saudi public university and aimed to investigate the major obstacles that they encounter regarding academic writing and most importantly the reasons behind these problems. The researcher explored three mutual and yet, common factors that apparently contribute to increase the academic writing challenges encountered by those students. However, the major problems and the reasons behind them as well as brief overview the of the students' attitude towards the academic writing are presented in subsections.

Major Challenges L2 Academic Writing

According to the participants, there are various challenges occur while writing essays, assignment, or even short sentences. Some significant obstacles could be coming up with thesis topic, writing the introduction, provide supportive evidence, adding examples, writing an error-free sentence and form a conclusion. Furthermore, the participants encounter difficulty using transitional phrases such as *Moreover*. They, however, tend to use the long clauses and recruit words such as *also*, *and*, *but* very frequently. Also, the interviewees find it very challengeable to connect the ideas together and avoid disjointing them. Disjointing sentences causes an imbalance in the coherent unit of the sentences. Student C said:

"I used to think that the punctuation marks are the same in Arabic and English language, that led me to lose marks in my essay."

And Student B highlighted:

" I do not have enough amount of academic vocabulary; I need to increase the vocabular reservoir so I can use verity of expressions."

A frequent error that many students tend to make pertains to the writing mechanism. It's observed that participating students often transfer the punctuation conventions of Arabic into their English writing. Al-Mukhaizeem (2013) has pointed out that Saudi EFL students tend to misapply punctuation marks, with the comma being a notable example. Moreover, as highlighted by student B, the constrained vocabulary also poses a challenge, alongside the task of selecting appropriate words and expressions – a concern emphasized by Al-Mudhi (2019). Furthermore, grappling with the formulation of ideas is a hurdle they encounter, often leading them to resort to copying passages from other academic sources and online articles. This, however, increases the risk of falling into the plagiarism trap, a predicament not uncommon among students. Participant A, for instance, shared that she frequently relies on direct quotations in her assignments. Her instructor, recognizing the importance of avoiding plagiarism, encouraged her to explore other methods like paraphrasing to create original content. As a remedy, it becomes evident that these students require expert guidance and education to foster the ability to independently generate ideas and construct

coherent sentences. Such guidance could significantly assist them in transcending the challenges they face in academic writing.

Factors Contributing to L2 Academic Writing Challenges

The analysis of collected data has unveiled a significant correlation between the challenges encountered in L2 academic writing by English-major students at Saudi universities and various contributing factors. These factors encompass the assigned writing course lecturer, the inadequate integration of technology within the classroom, students' educational backgrounds, and their attitudes towards the subject.

Impact of Lecturer and Technological Implementation

As highlighted by the participants, a prevailing issue arises from certain lecturers assigned to teach writing courses who adhere strictly to the textbook content. A poignant example comes from Student A, who recounted her experience:

"In the second level, our teacher repeatedly instructed us to copy and paste a model paragraph straight from the textbook. She even mentioned that the very same paragraph would appear in the mid-term exam. Unfortunately, she didn't offer any beneficial worksheets or exercises. Throughout that semester, I observed minimal improvement in my academic writing skills."

This one-dimensional approach, coupled with the absence of supplementary materials or interactive exercises, hindered her progress in mastering academic writing. This emphasizes the necessity of dynamic teaching methods and diverse resources to effectively address the intricacies of L2 academic writing challenges.

Student A's insightful observation concerning the teaching approach employed in the second semester underscores a fundamental issue in pedagogy. The "copy and paste" methodology, while seemingly focused on duplication, appears to fall short in fostering genuine writing skills. Rather, it appears to have a limited impact, mainly enhancing students' penmanship rather than their aptitude for coherent expression. This serves as a poignant reminder that teaching methodologies must extend beyond superficial practices and delve into more comprehensive techniques. To facilitate effective learning in academic writing, a multifaceted strategy is crucial. Student A's recommendation of utilizing worksheets aligns with educational research emphasizing active engagement. The integration of diverse teaching techniques, such as collaborative and independent learning, has shown promising results in enhancing students' writing capabilities. Nonetheless, it is paramount for educators to tap into a wide array of resources beyond the standard coursebook and exercises. Relying solely on these resources may inadvertently limit students' growth potential. Moreover, educators must ensure the alignment of instructional methods with the course's desired outcomes. The importance of achieving these goals cannot be overstated. When outcomes are not effectively met, the supplementation of learning materials becomes a necessity. This highlights the significance of adaptability and innovation within the educational framework. Ultimately, the instructor plays a pivotal role in shaping students' writing proficiency. As educators, they bear the responsibility of fostering a holistic approach to academic writing. This includes employing varied methodologies, integrating supplemental resources, and cultivating an environment that nurtures authentic skill development. By doing so, they empower learners to transcend mere duplication and instead, cultivate the art of effective written expression.

On the other hand, Student B mentioned: "Some lecturers were excellent, and I would rate them ten out of ten. But the use of technology is way too poor, I think pen and paper-based is old method nowadays. I would recommend making use of interesting applications and activate the

Blackboard so we can send our piece of writing via the Blackboard rather than submitting it in a form of printed papers"

Student B's perspective brings forth the dichotomy between effective instruction and technological integration. While acknowledging the excellence of certain educators, Student B underscores a crucial gap in utilizing technology to its fullest potential. The assertion that pen and paper-based methods are antiquated reinforces the need for a shift towards contemporary teaching practices. Embracing technology not only modernizes the learning experience but also enhances engagement and efficiency. Student B's suggestion to leverage engaging applications and activate platforms like Blackboard demonstrates a forward-thinking approach that aligns with the evolving educational landscape.

Echoing this sentiment, Student A accentuates the pivotal role of technology and platform-provided activities in the journey of academic writing mastery. These tools serve as catalysts, offering innovative ways to interact with the material and nurture critical skills. The integration of technology extends beyond superficial enhancements; it becomes a conduit for dynamic engagement and skill development. Student A added: "The use of technology as well as those activities that are provided by some platforms play a vital role in learning and mastering the academic writing."

Participants C stated that: "Technology enhances my writing in general and the academic writing. I found numerous websites that provide its subscribers with automatic correction of the mistakes. Furthermore, other websites provide academic words and phrases that can be used while writing the assigned essays."

Participant C further emphasizes the transformative influence of technology on writing prowess. The discovery of websites offering automated error correction is emblematic of technology's capacity to streamline the revision process. Similarly, the availability of resources furnishing academic vocabulary enriches the students' linguistic toolkit for crafting sophisticated essays. Collectively, these accounts underscore technology's multifaceted potential to enhance academic writing. From enabling remote submission via platforms like Blackboard to providing access to error-correction mechanisms and specialized vocabulary repositories, technology transforms the writing landscape. It bridges the gap between traditional practices and contemporary demands, equipping students with the tools they need to excel in the realm of academic writing.

In a bid to explore the impact of technology on the core language skills, Van, et al., (2021) conducted a meticulous study at Van Lang University. Focusing on fifth and sixth-level students in the Foreign Language Department, the study aimed to gauge technology's effectiveness in refining the crucial skills of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. Employing a blend of questionnaires and interviews, the research unravelled intriguing insights into the learners' engagement and the role of technology.

Remarkably, the research findings unveiled a resounding endorsement for technology as an invaluable educational tool. A considerable majority of participants affirmed that their learning experience was significantly enhanced through technology integration. This sentiment aligns with Ahmadi's perspective (2018), advocating for technology's role as an auxiliary companion in the teaching process. The assertion that technology fosters seamless learning resonates with the students' experiences, validating the notion that technology paves the way for smoother knowledge acquisition. Interestingly, the learners' enthusiasm extended to blended learning environments, where technology was harnessed in conjunction with engaging applications. This hybrid approach not only captured their interest but also underscored the synergy between effective pedagogy and

modern tools. Importantly, participants recognized that technology's implementation assuaged the challenges they encountered in academic writing. However, a significant shortcoming emerged: the inadequacies in technology implementation both within and outside the classroom. The students voiced their concerns, expressing a desire for more comprehensive consideration of this critical aspect.

Underscoring how students can effectively surmount language learning challenges through a tech-driven approach. When harnessed adeptly, technology transforms the educational environment, fortifying learners' grasp of discourse while honing their academic writing prowess. However, it is imperative to note that suboptimal technology application can lead to a disengaged and uninterested cohort. Herein lies the pivotal role of technology activation within the writing course, rendering it a potent catalyst for invigorated learning. The interplay between technology, pedagogy, and learners' aspirations emerges as a linchpin in the language learning landscape. Embracing technology in harmony with effective teaching methodologies propels students towards comprehensive skills mastery, while its negligent application risks undermining their enthusiasm and potential. The lesson drawn is clear: the strategic fusion of technology and education holds the key to unlocking an enriched and empowered language learning experience.

Students' Educational Background

Another reason that could be behind some of the academic writing challenges is the weak foundation they receive in the high school education. According to the interviewees, the English language curriculum that is taught in Saudi high schools does not recruit the writing skill that should have provided them with the basic knowledge of writing so they can master the academic writing later. This gap is described by Student B:

"Writing section in every unit has a poor activity, some of these activities related to the reading passage of the unite, and the questions of it as following: 1-How many paragraph are there? 2- Identify the main idea 3- What does the writer use to support his view: a) examples b) question to the reader c) opposite view and comment."

The participant thinks that this kind of activities has no connection with the writing skill, but it is related to reading comprehension. She also remarked that other skills are dominant whereas writing skill does not receive a great attention in the English coursebook of the high school education in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the participants A and B stated that there are a writing instruction in the coursebook, provide them with guidelines to be a competent academic writer, such as *Writing Coroner*, but activities again never reinforce them to write even a whole paragraph yet, instead under these instructions, there is a fill in the plank activity in which they think it is not applicant and will never give the students the opportunities to practice the writing skill and apply the roles of it. They added that there are exercises that may encourage students to write only short sentences. The students provided a brief overview of the current status. This gap in the English language curricula prevents them from acquiring the basic and the essential skills and knowledge of writing in general and thus, the students find numerous challenges regarding the academic writing.

A crucial factor contributing to academic writing challenges is the students' foundational educational background, specifically the deficiencies prevalent in Saudi high school English curricula. Interviewees reveal that these curricula inadequately nurture writing skills, failing to equip learners with the essential groundwork necessary for mastering academic writing later on. This educational gap is exemplified by Student B, who highlights the insufficiencies within the high school English language curriculum. Activities within the writing section of units tend to

focus on reading comprehension rather than genuine writing skills development. Activities such as identifying the main idea and analyzing the writer's approach to support their viewpoint fail to cultivate authentic writing abilities. Moreover, participants A and B note that while there are writing instructions in the high school coursebook, they often lack the practical reinforcement needed for effective skill acquisition. Despite guidelines provided by resources like the "Writing Corner," activities fail to encourage comprehensive writing. Instead, they are often limited to simplistic fill-in-the-blank exercises or short sentence construction. This prevalent scenario points to a significant gap in the English language curriculum's design, where writing instruction takes a back seat to other skills. As a result, students lack the opportunity to cultivate foundational writing competence. This gap reverberates through their academic journey, causing hurdles in academic writing later on. In essence, the shortcomings in high school English education hinder students from gaining the vital skills and knowledge required for proficient writing. These inadequacies set the stage for the academic writing challenges students encounter, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive and skill-oriented approach to writing education at an earlier stage.

The students' attitude towards the L2 academic writing

The results of the distributed survey are briefly reported and discussed here. The aim of the questionnaire is to investigate whether there is a correlation between student's attitude and the academic writing difficulties.

The first statement is "*Academic writing is not an important skill for me*" (50%) of the overall responses points out that students agreed and strongly agreed that academic writing is not crucial skill, whereas (49%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. These figures indicate that the majority of students do not accept the academic writing's importance. Moving on, the following item account for their behavior in the writing classes in which it states, "*I do not pay much attention in academic writing class*", (64.3%) of the students answered with agree and strongly agree and that shed the light on the lack of focus and interest inside the classroom and yet may lead to an observable weakness in their performance as a consequence. The next item's purpose is to explore whether the students study and develop their academic writing skill for the assessment only and not because another motives "*I study English writing only for exam\assessment test*"; (57%) represents the agreement and (32%) accounts for disagreement. The findings of this statement showed the fact that the vast majority are not learning the writing skill for any external motives yet those who do so are representing the one-third of the overall participants. Furthermore, the participants were asked about technology in learning to assess their attitude towards it in few sentences. The former is "*I like to share online materials before writing*" and the latter is "*Using platforms such as-Grammarly, YouTube, Google Scholar- enhances my writings*", the responses are as follow; (77%) agreement on the first statement and (85%) total agreement on the second statement. Students clearly showed a positive attitude towards the modern technology. The questionnaire further states questions regarding the teachers' feedback and motivations, "*Teachers motivational words are always helpful for me*", half of the students agreed and (21%) strongly agreed that teachers feedback affects them positively. Overall, the previous data indicates that students generally adopt a negative attitude towards writing and academic writing as in the statement one, two and three. This exposes us to other reason behind the academic writing challenges. Furthermore, the data shed the light on the students great welcoming to the technology blending with the learning process namely with writing that as mentioned earlier students in the interview complained about the poor implementation of the technology tools and thought this is a significant cause of academic writing challenges. Lastly, participants would like to receive such a feedback and motivational words from

their instructors, so, the importance of the teacher's role and observations cannot be ignored, and they would improve yet reinforce students to write more and overcome their weaknesses.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

The following are the major obstacles identified in this study. First, lack of qualified lecturers to teach L2 academic writing is a critical issue in Saudi universities. The study found that many of the lecturers teaching writing courses in Saudi universities are not qualified to do so. They may not have the necessary training or experience in teaching academic writing, or they may not be fluent enough in English to effectively communicate with students. Second issue is the poor use of technology. The study also found that technology is not being used effectively to support academic writing instruction. Many lecturers do not use technology in their classrooms, or they use it in a way that is not effective. For example, they may use PowerPoint presentations that are simply a copy of the textbook content, or they may use online grammar checkers that do not provide students with any feedback on their writing. The third issue is the students' educational background. The study found that students' educational background also plays a role in their academic writing challenges. Students who come from schools where English is not the medium of instruction may have difficulty with the language, and they may not have had enough exposure to academic writing. The fourth issue is students' attitude toward academic writing. The study also found that students' attitude towards academic writing can affect their performance. Students who are not motivated to write, or who are afraid of making mistakes, may be less likely to succeed in academic writing courses.

The following factors can contribute to the challenges of L2 academic writing. First, a lecturer who is stuck to the textbook content may not provide students with the opportunity to practice the skills they need to succeed in academic writing. For example, they may not give students enough opportunities to write essays, or they may not provide them with feedback on their writing. In Saudi university context, Alhamami and Ahmad (2018) realized that Saudi universities depend on commercial EFL textbooks that might not help teachers to achieve the course learning outcomes. Second, the poor use of technology can make it difficult for students to learn about academic writing. For example, a lecturer who uses PowerPoint presentations that are simply a copy of the textbook content may not be providing students with any new information. Third, students who come from schools where English is not the medium of instruction may have difficulty with the language. They may not be familiar with the vocabulary and grammar that are used in academic writing, and they may not be able to write fluently. Fourth, students who are not motivated to write, or who are afraid of making mistakes, may be less likely to put in the effort to succeed in academic writing courses. They may procrastinate on assignments, or they may not ask for help when they need it. These are just a few of the factors that can contribute to the challenges of L2 academic writing. It is important to be aware of these factors so that we can address them and help students succeed in academic writing courses.

The following suggestions might help to address these factors. First, train and qualify lecturers to teach academic writing: Universities should provide training and professional development opportunities for lecturers who teach academic writing. This training should cover the principles of academic writing, as well as the use of technology in the classroom. Second, use technology effectively to support academic writing instruction: Universities should invest in technology that can be used to support academic writing instruction. This technology can include online grammar checkers, plagiarism detection tools, and writing workshops. Third, provide students with more opportunities to practice academic writing: Universities should provide students with more opportunities to practice academic writing. This can be done through writing

workshops, peer review sessions, and writing centers. fourth, help students develop a positive attitude towards academic writing: Universities should help students develop a positive attitude towards academic writing. This can be done by providing students with positive feedback on their writing, and by creating a supportive learning environment.

The study has several limitations. First, the sample of the study was only female students and does not include any male students. This means that the findings of the study may not be generalizable to male English-majored students. Second, the sampling number was not representative to the overall number of English-majored students at Saudi University. This means that the findings of the study may not be representative of the experiences of all English-majored students at Saudi University.

To address the limitations of the study, future research could be conducted with a larger and more representative sample of students that include both males and females. Future research could also use more in-depth methods of data collection, such as student-written forms (previous student writings) and interviews with teachers. Future research could also examine the writing curricula that is taught in the university to see if it is contributing to the challenges that students face. Finally, future research could provide solutions to the challenges that students face in academic writing, such as providing teachers with training on how to teach academic writing effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified several common challenges that university students face in academic writing, including thinking of a thesis topic, writing an introduction, providing supportive evidence and examples, producing error-free sentences, and forming a conclusion. These challenges are caused by several factors, including ineffective teaching methods, a weak foundation in writing from high school, and a negative attitude towards academic writing. However, the study also found that students are receptive to the use of technology in writing classes and to feedback from teachers. The study concludes that the more technology is used and the more feedback students receive, the fewer challenges they will face in academic writing. The study's findings are valuable insights into the challenges of academic writing for university students. The findings can be used to inform the development of more effective teaching methods and to provide support to students who are struggling with academic writing. Teachers can use technology to provide students with feedback on their writing. This can be done through online grammar checkers, plagiarism detection tools, and writing workshops. Teachers can provide students with opportunities to practice academic writing through peer review sessions and writing centers. Teachers can help students develop a positive attitude towards academic writing by providing them with positive feedback and encouragement. By taking these steps, teachers can help students overcome the challenges of academic writing and develop the skills they need to succeed in their studies.

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Appendix A:

The Translation of Interview guidelines questions

1. Mention the difficulties that you encounter with writing.

A-Is it overall difficulty?

B- do you find it difficult to come up with thesis or essay topic?

C- are you good at writing introduction?

D-are you good in forming a conclusion?

E-can you write an error-free sentences?

F-can you write cohesively?

G- what other sort of difficulty you encounter?

H-do you find it daunting to choose the accurate expression while writing?

2. The factors

a. Mention any factor that contributed to the increase of these difficulties.

b. if your teacher was one reason behind that, why? And mention some examples.

c. what kind of instruction happens in the writing classes?

d. how can the poor employment of the technology increase this trend?

e. Do you think technology would assist in overcoming some challenges of academic writing?

f. Did you have the enough basic knowledge before being enrolled in the university?

g. What sort of problems you encountered in high school foundation?

h. does that effected your academic writing competence at the moment?

Appendix: B

The questionnaire Items

Major*

English language. Or Other

The level *

first- second

third-fourth

fifth-sixth

seventh- eight (Senior year)

1. Academic Writing in not an important skill for me.
2. I do not pay much attention in academic writing class.
3. I study English writing test only for exam\assessment test.
4. I like to share online materials before writing.
5. I watch some videos on related topic before writing.
6. Academic writing is important for success in my career.
7. I read books on related topics before writing.
8. Using platforms such as-Grammarly, YouTube, Google Scholar- enhances my writings.
9. Teachers' motivational words are always helpful for me.