

# Postgraduates Students' Difficulties in Academic Writing Skills from the Perspective of their Teachers

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## Abstract

In the existing scenario of Indian education system, academic writing has been studied by numerous scholars in the field of English language teaching as it is one of the most essential criteria to assess students' learning. There is an obvious demand for academic writing at an advanced level in Indian universities in the majority of disciplines: sociology, science, engineering, history, law, psychology, and English which expect from the learners being proficient enough narrators and relatively good in displaying academic knowledge in the academic documents such as short and long assignments, academic essays, email, research papers, thesis and dissertations. A survey amidst 30 teachers of English was carried out by the investigator in search of the current needs of academic writing skills of postgraduate learners. Later analyzed data showed that greater number of their learners have been suffering from academic writing skills; brainstorming, note-taking, note-making, summarising, paraphrasing, abbreviation, acronyms, academic email, and resume, making an outline before writing a draft, avoiding plagiarism, citation, and reference. They also believe that learners are quite familiar with few academic writing skills, however, by and large; academic writing skills are not utilized correctly.

## Key Words

Academic Writing, ELT, Postgraduate Students, Difficulties, Teachers

## Introduction

“English language has become a passport to get proper employment”

Verma, A. (2014)

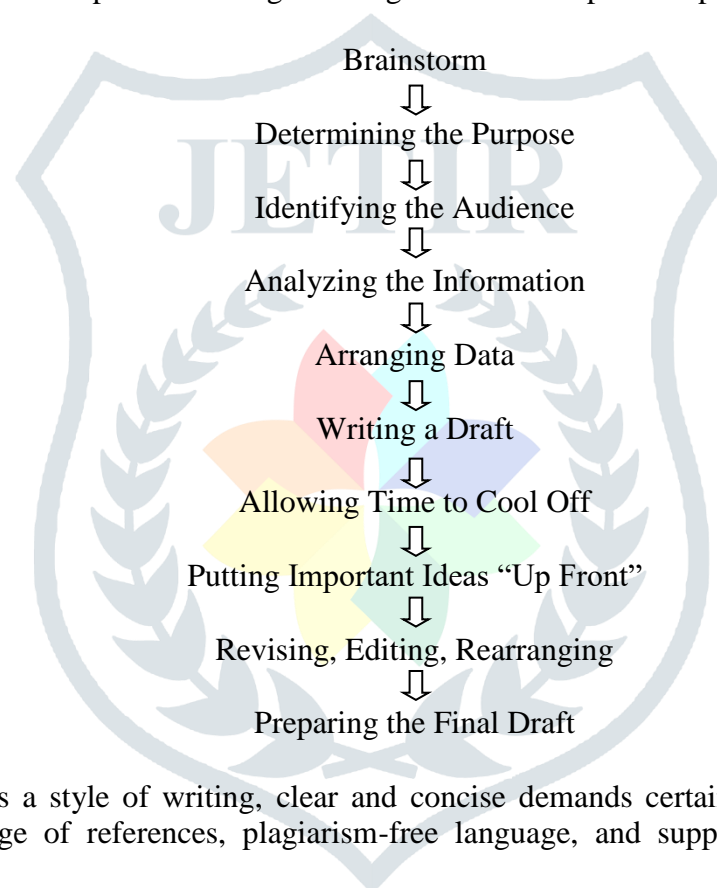
Language is the only tool developed on this planet for human beings through which they can be more expressive than the other categories of living souls where English plays an essential role. In every corner of the world, English has been spread its wings. It is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language in over 100 countries; China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt, Brazil, and many more. In the majority of these nations, it has been emerged as a chief foreign language to be encountered in schools (Crystal, 1997). On the other hand, when it comes to the nation of India, it is still contemplated as a second language (the medium of instruction for a higher level in both academics and technological fields) than a foreign language. Though there is an increasing insistence on English education, the objectives seem to be far out of reach. On the contrary, Banerjee (2016) claimed, “It is interesting to note that India, a multilingual nation, is the third-largest English speaking country after the US and UK. In India, it is increasingly being perceived as a 'must know' language. It has now become a ladder for upward social mobility and 'a window to the world”.

Writing is a set of process which starts from generating ideas to transfer into a written form. To express these ideas are accessible, whereas transferring it into written form is quite challenging since it needs some language aspects: structure, choice of vocabulary, sentence formation and knowledge of writing features (Mevada, 2018). In alignment with this view, Liz and Ben (2006) state, usually writing is perceived in a three-stage process which is pre-writing, writing and rewriting which is an oversimplification, though helpful. Traditional teachers were focusing on the end of the second stage only which was the one, done after writing because they were unaware of their intercede at the pre-writing and writing stage. Moreover, rewriting for them was the only means of correcting the mistakes. Consequently, learners often had serious difficulty in how to deal with writing. Correspondingly, Bowker (2007) has depicted that simple writing is a skill requisite in many contexts all through life, used to communicate the events happens in life, does not demand a structure. To deploy causal expression, colloquialism and abbreviations (“by the way”, “b4”, “thru”, “that’s cool”) are also acceptable. On contrary, academic writing is writing targeted for the critical and formal audience including instructors, professors, lecturers, students, and researchers which demand to become capable enough in organizing ideas and structure into categories and sub-classes. According to Monippally and Pawar (2010), “...academic writing, as a means of documenting and communicating scientific knowledge,

documents and communicates research process and research outcomes. Documentation of research process describes how the research process was carried out and how the knowledge was generated, and the documentation of the research outcomes describes the knowledge that was generated through the implementation of the documented research process”.

### Review of Related Literature

Academic writing is a wide umbrella term which is very significant for the learners of all the disciplines (Jordan, 1997). Oftentimes it has been described as a demanding task as it is the manifestation of the professional learning journey or constant process involves reflection, improvement, development, progress, and fulfillment of multiple types and in differing measures. According to Liz and Ben (2006, p. 17), “...academic texts have predictable patterns of grammar, organization, argument, and of giving credit to the work and words of others.” Academic writing is a difficult process, however, if by focusing on reading and the ideas generated during and after, the process can be developed into a more manageable and rewarding experience. Similarly, the basic tool of academic writing is to become capable of organizing the ideas and concept in categories and classes, which are the fundamental sections, adhere to subcategories and subclasses, smaller and more closely exemplified. Goodman (1994) states that academic writing follows step by step dynamic process from generating ideas to end up with a pen and paper such as:



Likewise, academic writing is a style of writing, clear and concise demands certain rules to be followed; formal language, structure, knowledge of references, plagiarism-free language, and supportive evidence to defend the argument (Bowker, 2007)

The only way to demonstrate skills in communicating with the marker for learners is through their writing (Bowker, 2007). However, in the present state of affairs, the entire teaching-learning system has become exam-oriented and degree-driven. Teachers have limited hours to teach and learners have limited hours to learn. On the other hand, the demand for academic writing is increasing rapidly; learners are asked to submit academic assignments, present research papers, write academic essays or paragraphs, write a dissertation and thesis. But, the lack of academic writing skills' knowledge causes limited exposure to language; the majority of them strive to deal with it.

Numerous studies have also been conducted in the area of academic writing:

#### ✓ Academic Writing Practice: International Level

Fadda, H. A. (2012) has discovered through the study “Difficulties in Academic Writing: From the perspective of King Saud University Postgraduate Students” that learning to write in academic English is a challenging and difficult task for King Saud University learners. Postgraduate learners struggle in determining spoken and written English in academic writing, outlining before writing a draft, avoiding plague words and phrases and distinguishing skills need in writing. Consequently, the researcher says, it is indispensable to give thought to academic writing at the university level.

### ✓ Academic Writing Practice: National Level

“Using TBLT for academic writing: A study for Evaluating academic writing scenario and implementing it in the simpler form” by Baria, (2019) sheds light on what academic writing in a simpler form and how TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) can be effective for teaching academic writing. The researcher has also reviewed various teaching-learning methods and approaches and focused on how TBLT is best among all.

### The Rationale of the Study

Mohanraj (2019) states, “Writing has been a topic of concern at all levels of language teaching. There has been adequate research to find a reason for the inherent reluctance to take to writing readily. We spend less than 10% of our communication time for writing and this is abysmally low.” Writing is learned through a set of practices, as it does not naturally get hands-on ability. In alignment Shastri (2010) evaluated, “Listening and speaking come naturally to a person but one has to learn the rudiments of writing in one's mother tongue. Writing is a difficult skill, as it needs coordination of motor skills and brain. It is more conventional and conservative than spoken language. It needs systematic training. The teacher has to teach the learners to record their experience in writing”.

Writing in academic English at an advanced level often poses many challenges for learners, especially for non-native learners in grammar, lexis, and syntax. These challenges are worsened when they stuck in organizing ideas and citing published authors. According to Oshima and Hogue, “Writing, particularly academic writing is not easy. It takes study and practice to develop... both native speakers and new learners of English, it is important to note that writing is a process, not a "product".”

Postgraduate learners of Indian universities pursue their education in numerous disciplines such as sociology, science, engineering, history, law, psychology, English and many more. During their academic career, they are required to write academic documents as short and long assignments, tests, exams, academic essays, research papers, conference papers, thesis, and dissertations. Here, what they need is to be proficient enough narrators and relatively good in displaying academic knowledge. However, learners are unaware of the clear concept of academic writing and its sub-skills.

The researcher had also observed during her professional and academic career that learners encounter numerous challenges to produce a good write up of academic writing: both language and organization problems. Repeatedly, less motivation and high expectations in exams are also causing of underdeveloped academic writing skills. However, ensuring these issues, the researcher has conducted a survey, approaching 30 postgraduate teachers of English from the various institutes in Gujarat, India to gathered information about academic m writing difficulties of postgraduate learners. Accordingly, a questionnaire was used to collect this data.

### Discussion

The following data was gathered from the survey sheds light on the challenges learners have been facing in academic writing at the Postgraduate level.

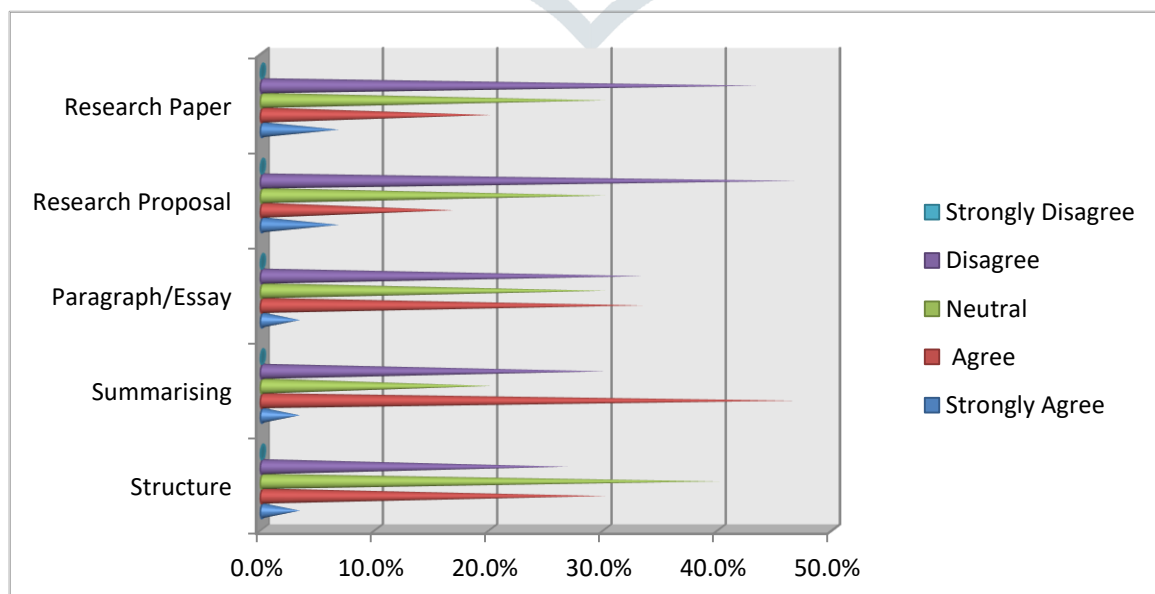


Figure 1 brings out data on the problems postgraduate learners have been facing in academic writing skills. As high as around 46.7% of the teachers believe that learners are quite familiar with summarising a paragraph skill and 40% of them are not supporting either side by being neutral for structure. However, 47% of them have a pure opposite opinion; said that postgraduate learners require being more skilled enough in preparing a research proposal. Correspondingly, the same teachers about 44% of them have a similar point of view on writing a research paper. Besides, 50% of the teachers are agreed and 50% of them disagree on the statements that learners are proficient enough in paragraph or essay writing skill in academic writing.

### Suggestions

The present analysis throws light on the five major academic writing skills in which postgraduate learners have been facing problems. Research suggests that our educationalists should take this issue of academic writing skills at an advanced level with seriousness since it is an important need for them to develop essential techniques, tones, and styles for their university assignments and other works. It is also substantive for them to think critically, naturally and logically to convey complex ideas into the well-mannered format.

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