Identifying students' academic writing difficulties and the factors behind them at the Faculty of Education of Tripoli University, Libya.

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ملخص الدراسة

يعد هذا البحث ملخصًا لدراسة أجريت بهدف التعرف على صعوبات الكتابة الأكاديمية التي يواجهها بعض طلاب الجامعيين و هدفت أيضا إلى معرفة العوامل التي تؤثر على كتابتهم الأكاديمية. حيث شارك في هذه الدراسة 38 طالباً من طلاب تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية جامعة طرابلس. وقد تم تصميم استبانة بناءً على الدراسات البحثية التي تمت مراجعتها للتعرف على صعوبات الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى الطلاب والعوامل الرئيسية وراء تلك الصعوبات من أجل الحصول الإجابة على أسئلة البحث. كشف تحليل البيانات أن طلاب المرحلة الجامعية واجهوا بعض الصعوبات الكبيرة في الكتابة الأكاديمية. وبشكل أكثر تحديدًا، كانت تلك الصعوبات تتمثل في صعوبة كتابة بيان أطروحة واضح في كتاباتهم، و صعوبة التمييز بين أنواع الكتابة الأكاديمية، وصعوبة توفير اقتباس مناسب داخل النص, وصعوبة استخدام علامات الخطاب المناسبة في كتاباتهم لربط الجمل و صعوبات في الكتابة المتناسقة، في حين أنه لا يبدو أن هناك أي صعوبات تقريبًا تشكل تحديًا للطلاب في استخدام قواعد اللغة وآليات الكتابة مثل التهجئة وعلامات الترقيم والأحرف الكبيرة في كتاباتهم الأكاديمية او أي صعوبة في كتابة مقدمة لمقالاتهم بالإضافة إلى وجود صعوبات قليلة في طريقة كتابة استنتاج واضح في كتاباتهم. حيث تُعزى هذه الصعوبات إلى عدد من الأسباب، مثل ضعف إتقان الطلاب للغة الإنجليزية وعدم كفاية الموارد المطلوبة مثل (المكتبة والإنترنت والكتب والمقالات وبعض المواد الصوتية والمرئية) ، كما كان أن عدم توفر فرص ممارسة الكتابة في الفصل الدراسي هو من الأسباب الرئيسية وراء تلك الصعوبات . لذلك نأمل أن تضيف نتائج هذه الدراسة معلومات جديدة إلى البحث الحالي الجديد وتوفر رؤى مثمرة لمدرسي الكتابة ومطوري مواد الكتابة لمساعدة المتعلمين من التغلب على صعوبات الكتابة التي قد يواجهونها في المستقبل. ومع ذلك، لا يمكن تعميم نتائج هذه الدراسة على طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بسبب نطاق الدراسة وصغر حجم العينة.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a summary of a study was conducted with the aim to identify the academic writing difficulties encountered by some university students. It also aimed to find out the factors that affect their academic writing . Therefore, 38 students majoring in English at the Faculty of Education of Tripoli University participated in this study. A questionnaire was designed based on the literature reviewed and was used to identify the students' academic writing difficulties and the main factors behind those difficulties in order to answer the research questions. The data analysis revealed that undergraduate students experienced some major difficulties in academic writing. More specifically, those difficulties were in providing a clear thesis statement in their writing, distinguishing types of genre in academic writing, providing a proper in-text citation in their writing (APA style), using appropriate discourse markers in their writing to connect the sentences and writing coherent sentences, whereas almost no difficulties seemed to pose a challenge for students in using grammar and mechanics of writing such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in their academic writing and in writing introduction for their essays as well as little difficulty in providing clear conclusion in their writing. Those difficulties were attributed to a number of reasons, such

as students' poor English language proficiency and Inadequate access to resources (library, internet, books, articles, audio & visual facilities), and the lack of writing practice opportunities in class room were the main reasons behind those major difficulties. The findings of this study will hopefully add new information to the new current research and provide fruitful insights to the writing teachers and writing materials developers to help learners overcome the writing difficulties they might experience in future. However, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the EFL students due to the scope of the study and the small size of the sample.

KEYWORDS: writing difficulties, academic writing, EFL students, potential factors.

1.INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is scholarly central to an academic's professional life. Academic writing is a formal style of writing used by many university students, instructors, and researchers. Admittedly, academic writing is different from everyday writing since it has its unique features, a distinctive format, specific words and specific audience for whom it is written. Therefore, academic writers are not only expected to produce texts that will represent an external reality, but also to be able to use language to produce a salient and dependable illustration of themselves and their work to the audience. As a result, it is expected from the academic writers to use their writing proficiency to control the level of identity in their texts and to maintain solidarity with readers. Academic writers are also expected to assess what is available and to accept different views, which is perceived, as a key feature of successful academic writing and is highly required in the competitive academia. From this perspective, academic writing is a common method of assessing students at the university level, where students are expected to do different written assignments and conduct research in spite of the fact that it is not an easy task for many students to acquire (Al-Marwani, 2020). Difficulties in academic writing are common among EFL learners and native speakers of English too. As Sullivan (1996) states that these difficulties and challenges are in parallel with the background and the processes that graduate students experience and, therefore, they deserve careful attention. However, at the university level, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to generate their ideas and organize their writing into paragraphs that are logically linked and smoothly developed. Moreover, EFL students should do some wide reading about the topic they are searching about, write a clear outline, decide what should be included in the introduction of their writing, how to develop the main body of their writing, and come up with a strong conclusion. Academic writing is different from other types of writing and thus should be based on documented evidence not on the writer's personal views or opinions. However, many research studies found that students at the academic university level experience difficulties not only how to demonstrate the academic knowledge but also how to use that knowledge to argue logically and coherently which appears to be a major difficulty for non-native graduate students coming from different linguistic, cultural and

educational backgrounds. In this regard, students need to develop their research skills, summarizing and paraphrasing information, and using a direct quotation with an accurate referencing system (Abdulkareem, 2013).

Based on what has been introduced above, it can be argued that effective academic writing appears to be very important for EFL students as most of the assessment methods used in higher education should concentrate not only on the quality of information, but also on how it is presented (Dudu & Subanda 2012)

Research suggested that there were various behind the difficulties encountered by most EFL learners in mastering academic writing and consequently failed to obtain a passing grade (Al Mubarak, 2017). The same problems seem to be found among EFL Libyan university students who study English as a foreign language and who are supposed to do their written work as they are assigned by their instructors and according to the required standards of the university testing system. However, based on some graduation projects supervised by the researcher which were conducted by the students in their final semester at the faculty of education of Tripoli university, it has been brought to the researcher's attention that some EFL students have experienced a number of difficulties when they are required to write a coherent piece of writing. These difficulties may be the result of different factors such as ineffective methods of teaching, teaching materials and lack of time devoted to teaching writing skills, lack of motivation, and maybe lack of some other important resources.

Therefore, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the academic writing difficulties encountered by Libyan EFL students?

2. What are the factors behind the EFL students' academic writing difficulties?

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Academic writing Difficulties

Academic writing is different from other types of genres. The term of Academic writing is broad and is defined by many scholars, for instance, Al-Mansour (2015) defined academic writing as a host of references, information, and evidence to support it. Further to that, academic writing is scholarly in its nature, presentation, and its penchant for reasoning and logic. Also, Tardy (2005) described academic writing as a transformation of knowledge that involves convincing readers of the value, significance, and credibility of one's work. Similarly, Abdulkareem (2013) describes academic writing as the construction and development of techniques taught in universities such as organizing and generating students' ideas and critical thinking and developing vocabulary and grammatical syntax. Likewise, Irvin (2010) described academic writing as a form of assessment that requires learners to display

understanding and competence of specific skills such as making inferences, analysis, and production.

Moreover, Hayland (2002) states that academic writing relies on style, content, and the tangible information and details that protect the formal style that qualifies writing to be academic in order to be presented to its specific audience, scholars, and teachers.

Additionally, Defazio et al. (2010) argue that EFL learners 'competence in academic writing requires cognitive skills in understanding, application, and synthesis of knowledge. Characteristically, according to Hayland, (2002) academic writing involves well-linked paragraphs, perfectly connected ideas, elaborate structures, and a wide range of vocabulary, and coherent paragraphs.

Considering its salient features, academic writing could be a difficult skill to be learnt or taught due to the fact that it is not solely a cognitive activity; rather it is perceived as a complex mental production which requires careful thought, discipline and concentration (Grami, 2010).

In this respect, Al Fadda (2012) found out that the main difficulties ESL students experience in academic writing are the distinction between written and spoken words and phrases, and some grammatical aspects including subject-verb agreement and linking sentences together to make a coherent paragraph.

In addition to that, generating ideas about their topics could be also a difficulty that hinders students to move on in their writing (Al Murshidi, 2014). Another difficulty experienced by EFL learners is to read and then to write in their own words. This difficulty might lead to grammar mistakes which may make students reluctant to paraphrase and summarize other's work, instead of that, they just copy and paste what others have written before. (Amin & Alamin, 2012).

Therefore, Mudawy & Mousa, (2017) argue that to write academically, EFL students should be able to handle words critically and refer to the ideas of others to develop their voice, which was proved to be a major difficulty even for native speakers of English.

In relation to writing difficulties, Tardy (2010) stated that the difficulty students encounter in learning academic writing is multifaceted because they have to choose information, evaluate, summarize, report, paraphrase, argue, select grammatical patterns and words, and avoid plagiarism.

Research on academic writing has revealed that the range of difficulties encountered by EFL/ESL learners is broad and covers most language aspects. For example, the most major difficulties reported by EFL learners are vocabulary deficiency, First language interference and lack of grammatical rules, difficulties in reading, spelling, punctuation errors, verb form

mistakes, word order, spoken expressions, contracted forms, cohesion, and repetition of ideas (Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal,2016).

Moreover, most research studied suggested that difficulties in academic writing are also common among postgraduate students. For example, A survey study by Al Badi, (2015) on postgraduate international students in Australia revealed that difficulties encountered by EFL learners were coherence, cohesion, important topics, and relevant references, expressing their voice, paraphrasing, referencing, and citations.

However, Arab learners of English are no exception to the difficulties relating to academic writing in English as a foreign language. In other words, research has found that there were difficulties pertaining to the nature of Arabic as a language that result in the perplexity of the writing task. Some research Studies have indicated that writing in English is a complex process for Arab learners as stated by Shukri, (2014), and that learning academic writing is a major difficulty for Arab learners of English (Mallia, 2015).

With respect to grammar difficulties, a study by Al- Khatib (2017) to identify spelling errors encountered by Arab learners in academic writing found that students experienced difficulties in dealing with vowels that have different sound systems, silent letters, and different letters that have one sound. Further to that, Al- Fadda, (2012) claimed that the Arabic writing style and metaphoric phrases are also proved to be difficulties encountered by Arab learners.

As for the teaching mythologies used in teaching academic writing, studies have revealed that teaching approaches can in one way or another have a strong impact on students' writing learning (Anwar & Ahmed, 2016). Collaborative learning, for example, has been examined in several studies. For instance, Donato (1994) argues that writing in groups provides collective scaffolding where learners use their resources and construct knowledge collectively. In a similar study by Al-Tai (2015) revealed that group work was found to give better results and bigger achievement in fluency and task response than individual writing or pair work among students. Similarly, Khatib and Meihami (2015) found that collaborative writing approach has a positive impact on improving students' academic writing skills. They also concluded that students who wrote collaboratively in small groups did better in their writing in terms of organization, content, and grammar.

However, there were other research studies that proved the opposite. For instance, a survey study by Stroch (2005) revealed that texts written by students in pairs were more grammatically accurate with better language complexity and task achievement. Similarly, another study by Abbas and Al-Bakri (2018) found that the pair writing technique had a positive impact on the quality and quantity of students' writing and it had a positive impact on lowering students' writing anxiety as pair work creates a safe learning environment, improved their critical thinking skills, and gave them the opportunity to read and listen

critically and then give feedback. Teachers' feedback and guidance is supportive and constructive scaffolded method by lecturers to encourage students to improve their academic writing competence since the intervention by lecturers and their feedback is indispensable. The importance of teachers' feedback in learning writing is also stressed by Hasan and Karim (2019) who maintained that feedback enables learners to observe and anchor their weaknesses and raise their awareness of how to progress their academic writing.

Literature on academic writing strongly suggests that academic writing is not an easy process, and that even the most experienced academic writers encounter difficulties in their efforts to write productively and effectively. After having reviewed a number of research studies, it has become clear that the difficulty of learning academic writing is not limited to the Libyan university level students in the EFL context, but other students in some English speaking counties who have experienced academic writing difficulties as well. For instance , in a study by Dudu & Subanda, (2012) to find out the academic writing difficulties among undergraduate university students in Zimbabwe revealed that various difficulties and factors hindered students from being able to perform their written assignments according to the academic writing conventions. Most of these difficulties students experienced were with spelling, misuse of parts of speech, lack of subject-verb agreement, poor punctuation, failure to cite sources, and redundancy. Another study by Al Fadda (2012) which aimed to investigate the difficulties encountered by some postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia found that writing a coherent paragraph, distinguishing between compounds and modifiers, and avoiding grammatical mistakes in their writing were among the major difficulties students have experienced. Another study was carried out by Abdelkarim (2013) who identified the main academic writing difficulties encountered by some Arab students at the University of UTM in Malaysia found that sentence structure, vocabulary, and expressing ideas were among the major difficulties students encountered. Similarly, in study carried out by Al-Khairy (2013) on EFL students revealed that students were unable to choose the appropriate academic words, incorrect punctuation, linguistic and grammatical errors as the main difficulties encountered by the students.

Likewise, in another study carried out by Al-Mubarak (2017) on ESL students found that articles, punctuation, prepositions, irregular verbs, weak expressions, consistency paralleled structure, and use of verb tense were the main difficulties encountered by ESL students in learning academic writing . Difficulties in academic writing are broad and common, Aldabbus (2017) who investigated the EFL learners' difficulties experienced by some students in learning writing skills found that mechanics of writing, lack of organization and outlining their ideas were the major difficulties students experienced in academic writing.

From this perspective, one can argue that difficulties encountered by EFL/ESL learners in learning academic writing are not only limited to linguistic competence, but there are some

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other extra-linguistic factors, such as motivation. For instance, in a study by Al-Samadani (2010) revealed that the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in learning academic writing were not only restricted to linguistic and grammatical difficulties, but there were some other difficulties including writing a good thesis statement, developing, organizing, revising, and editing in order to maintain an error-free piece of writing.

2.2 Factors resulting in academic writing difficulties

Undoubtedly, there are various factors behind the major difficulties encountered by most university students in learning academic writing as shown in the research literature. Chou (2011) mentioned various reasons why international students studying in an English-speaking country encounter stress and challenges when writing their assignments. Firstly, because students come from different cultural backgrounds where they used to rely only on their teachers. The same students also don't seem to have been trained before to be critical thinkers and they do not think highly of their teachers as they used to do since they consider themselves ESL/EFL language learners. Therefore, as Al Murshidi, (2014) claims that writing teachers with high expectations think that students are good enough to produce an accurate piece of writing and that they might also ask students to write demanding topics that learners might struggle with when writing. Besides these barriers, low language proficiency might also hinder learners when it comes to academic writing as Ghabool, Edwina, and Kashef (2012) stated that this factor could be one of the main challenges students encounter in their academic writing.

There are other factors that could lead to a difficulty in academic writing among learners for instance, are L1 interference, inadequacy of ideas, and unclear instructions of the task . Various research studied indicated that the lack of clarity in the instructions provided by the instructors was one of the reasons for the low level of academic writing among students. In terms of ambiguous description of a writing task, Chou (2011) conducted a study on ESL learners and revealed that students felt shy and unconfident to ask their teachers for clarification.

Further to those factors, Aldabbus (2017) listed a number of reasons that could prevent learners from the acquisition of writing skills. On top of them is the L1 interference , different writing styles, problems wth the mechanics of writing, different sentence structures, problems with word order, and different use of articles. He also added that insufficient time for practising writing in class was another barrier among students.

Teaching students academic writing without giving them enough practice opportunities is one of the factors behind learners' academic writing difficulties . For instance Altaeb, (2018) argued that students are usually taught how to write sentences, paragraphs, and essays theoretically and then they are asked to practice writing them at home as homework.

Moreover, lack of clear and proper explanation of the writing task and could also be the reason why students experience difficulty in academic writing. Therefore, Al-Khairy (2013) claimed that the lack of clarity in the instructions provided by the instructors was one of the factors for the students' low level achievement in academic writing. It could be argued therefore, that the difficulty in comprehending task instructions is a challenging task for EFL learners due to inadequate knowledge of academic jargons, and thus, affecting the quality of outputs.

Another issue pointed out by the EFL learners is the lack of guidance and feedback from writing teachers. Inappropriate feedback provided by instructors was found to be another important reason behind the difficulties experienced by university students in academic writing. Negative feedback can also be a problem for learners as Altaeb, (2018) stated that giving students negative feedback makes them fear writing and will only adhere to the words and expressions they always use in order in order to avoid making mistakes. This, in turn, prevents students from the creativity and makes them stick to use the vocabulary sentences they have already learnt to avoid negative feedback from their teachers. There are many ways to overcome these difficulties and facilitate the process of learning academic writing skills as some researchers have suggested various remedial plans such as, encouraging students to do a lot of wide reading, read past papers or previous samples and models of academic writing, increase the number of practice writing opportunities as well as following the teachers' guidance, advice and feedback (Al-Marwani, 2020).

Further to factors resulting in writing difficulties, Mousaviand Kashefian (2011) found that the main reason why Iranian students were not proficient in Academic Writing was because of their inadequate level of English in writing as they encountered difficulties in both content and form. Another study by Al-Khasawneh's (2010) revealed that the main factors that influence students' academic writing were lack of sufficient vocabulary and hiccups in grammar and punctuation.

Moreover, a study by Alfaki (2015) found that a lack of motivation was as one of the factors why EFL/ESL students struggle hard with their writing. In addition to these obstacles, a study by Lamptey and Atta (2013) revealed that students experienced difficulties in doing citations of referencing information in their assignments because learners did not have the necessary awareness of academic writing, rewording the data, and organizing in-text citation and bibliographical lists.

Problems with the structure and content of academic writing were common among EFL learners. For example, a study by Xiao and Chen (2015) to identify the main difficulties experienced by EFL learners in academic writing found that the lack of depth and profundity in content were the main factors behind these difficulties as students were unable to produce new ideas and express their thoughts in organised & coherent piece of writing.

Truly speaking, academic writing is an important course that students, especially at the tertiary level, have to master, but it is also reported to be a difficult skill to acquire. The results of previous studies revealed that students experienced various difficulties in terms of content, structure, and language when required to do academic writing tasks. These difficulties were due to various factors including linguistic deficiency, lack of motivation, attitude towards academic writing, and writing technicalities.

In this respect, Khan (2011) reviewed a number of studies and stated that Arab learners' difficulties are mainly due to the shortage in the English language curriculum employed in some schools and universities, ineffective teaching methodologies and appropriate language environments as well as the lack of motivation among students. He also added that the main factor behind students' difficulties in academic writing was the lack of previous experience and knowledge about the standard conventions of academic writing and the expectations of the institution where they study.

Moreover, literature on students' lack of motivation as one factor behind EFL students' academic writing difficulties is rich. For example, Kobayashi & Rinnert (2008) stated that students' writing skills development can be affected by various of factors. One factor behind this difficulty lies in students' lack of motivation . Similarly, motivating students as described by Barkaoui (2007) is a tricky task. He also added that motivational factors do not only include learners' attitudes towards the nature and importance of academic writing, but they also involve students awareness of the differences between L1 and L2, their interest in the L2, and their writing proficiency.

3. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, a quantitative approach was employed to identify the major writing difficulties and the factors that encounter the Libyan undergraduate students to develop their academic writing skills in the Faculty of Education of Tripoli University. After having reviewed the relevant literature in the area of academic writing in particular, therefore, an attempt was made, based on the most research studies reviewed, to design a questionnaire as a suitable data collection tool that can be used in this study to gather the required data. The first part of the questionnaire with 24 items was designed to answer the first research question: (1) what are the major difficulties encountered by some undergraduate students in academic writing? While the second part of the questionnaire with 14 items was designed to answer the second research question (2) what are the factors behind the students' academic writing difficulties? The questionnaire was divided into 2 parts, potential academic writing difficulties and potential factors behind the difficulties encountered by university students in mastering academic writing skills.

3.1.Participants

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The subjects of this study consisted of 38 students majoring in English language at the Faculty of Education of Tripoli University. They were 38 undergraduates who have already completed all the required courses in order to obtain their B.A degree.

3.2. Data Collection

The 38 copies of the questionnaires were distributed through lecturers in classes and all data obtained were analysed.

3.3. Data Analysis

Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire, the number of the students and the percentages of responses were collected and compared with the major difficulties experienced by the participants. Therefore, highest percentage of the students would be considered to represent the students' major academic writing difficulties as well as the potential factors behind those difficulties.

Question1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your academic writing difficulties?

Table 1 Possible Academic Writing Difficulties

1:Academic Writing Difficulties	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I find it difficult to:					
1.To decide how to start the essay/paragraph.	N=3 7.8%	N=6 15.7%	N=10 26.3%	N=12 31.%	N=7 18.4%
2. To choose a significant topic before writing	N=4 10.5%	N=4 10.5%	N=6 15.7%	N=16 42.1%	N=8 21%
3. To provide a clear thesis statement in my writing	N=1 2.6%	N=4 10.5%	N=5 13.1%	N=22 57.8%	N=6 15.7%
4. To write an introduction to an essay	N=4 10.5%	N=12 31.%	N=9 23.6%	N=10 26.3%	N=3 7.8%
5. To organize the content of my writing	N=3 7.8%	N=8 21%	N=12 31.%	N=11 28.9%	N=4 10.5%
6. To plan the structure of my writing	N=5 13.1%	N=7 18.4%	N=8 21%	N=9 23.6%	N=7 18.4%
7.To write a clear topic sentence	N=5 13.1%	N=5 13.1%	N=7 18.4%	N=13 34.2%	N=8 21%
8. To provide sufficient main points in my writing	N=0	N=2 5.2%	N=8 21%	N=17 44.7%	N=11 28.9%
9. To provide sufficient supporting points in my writing	N=2 5.2%	N=4 10.5%	N=6 15.7%	N=16 42.1%	N=10 26.3%

10. To distinguish types of genre in Academic Writing	N=1 2.6%	N=3 7.8%	N=6 15.7%	N=21 55.2%	N=7 18.4%
11. To provide clear conclusion in my writing	N=7 18.4%	N=12 31.5%	N=9 23,6%	N=8 21%	N=2 5.2%
12. To provide a proper in-text citation in my writing (APA style)	N=0	N=4 10.5%	N=6 15.7%	N=19 50%	N=9 23.6%
13. To avoid plagiarism in my writing	N=3 7.8%	N=5 13.1%	N=6 15.7%	N=14 36.8%	N=10 26.3%
14. To use appropriate punctuation & capitalization in my writing	N=4 10.5%	N=13 34.2%	N=11 28.9%	N=9 23.6%	N=1 2.6%
15. To compile a correct reference list based in the APA style at the end of my writing	N=4 10.5%	N=6 15.7%	N=7 18.4%	N=12 31.5%	N=9 23.6%
16. To paraphrase and summarize relevant sources in my writing	N=2 5.2%	N=5 13.1%	N=7 18.4%	N=16 42.1%	N=8 21%
17. To use appropriate discourse markers in my writing to connect the sentences	N=0	N=3 7.8%	N=6 15.7%	N=18 47.3%	N=11 28.9%
18. To find the accurate vocabulary to express my writing	N=2 5.2%	N=5 13.1%	N=7 18.4%	N=15 39.4%	N=9 23.6%
19. To construct grammatically correct sentences in my writing	N=6 15.7%	N=4 10.5%	N=7 18.4%	N=12 31.5%	N=9 23.6%
20. To use Google to translate my writing to English	N=9 23.6%	N=13 34.2%	N=8 21%	N=5 13.1%	N=3 7.8%
21.To establish a connection between the paragraphs in an essay	N=0	N=5 13.1%	N=11 28.9%	N=13 34.2%	N=9 23.6%
22.To write a conclusion to an essay	N=4 10.5%	N=14 36.8%	N=10 26.3%	N=8 21%	N=2 5.2%
23.To create an understandable and coherent paragraph	N=0	N=6 15.7%	N=10 26.3%	N=14 36.8%	N=8 21%
24: To distinguish stylistic differences between written English texts, formal and informal styles	N=3 7.8%	N=5 13.1%	N=11 28.9%	N=12 31.5%	N=7 18.4%

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding factors behind your academic writing difficulties?

Table 2 Possible factors behind Academic Writing Difficulties

2:Factors behind Academic Writing Difficulties	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1:Overcrowded classrooms with students.	N=3 7.8%	N=5 13.1%	N=10 26.3%	N=13 34.2%	N=7 18.4%
2.Persistent use of first -language in generating ideas	N=5 13.1%	N=7 18.4%	N=8 21%	N=11 28.9%	N=7 18.4%
3.Irrelavant teaching writing materials	N=0	N=12 31.5%	N=11 28.9%	N=6 15.7%	N=9 23.6%
4: Writing Syllabus complexity	N=2 5.2%	N=7 18.4%	N=11 28.9%	N=10 26.3%	N=8 21%

5. Inadequate knowledge of academic jargons (lack of clear & proper explanation of the writing task or given examples).	N=5 13.1%	N=6 15.7%	N=7 18.4%	N=12 31.5%	N=8 21%
6.lack of motivation or interest in improving one	N=4 10.5%	N=14 36.8%	N=10 26.3%	N=6 15.7%	N=4 10.5%
7:Insufficient number of academic writing courses	N=0	N=6 15.7%	N=7 18.4%	N=15 39.4%	N=10 26.3%
8:Ineffective academic writing courses	N=5 13.1%	N=7 18.4%	N=7 18.4%	N=11 28.9%	N=8 21%
9: Ineffective teaching methods used by teachers	N=1 2.6%	N=6 15.7%	N=7 18.4%	N=16 42.1%	N=8 21%
10:Lack of writing practice opportunities in classroom	N=2 5.2%	N=5 13.1%	N=10 26.3%	N=15 39.4%	N=6 15.7%
11:Insufficient feedback and guidance from teachers	N=3 7.8%	N=5 13.1%	N=7 18.4%	N=13 34.2%	N=10 26.3%
12: Inappropriate testing system used by teachers	N=3 7.8%	N=11 28.9%	N=10 26.3%	N=9 23.6%	N=5 13.1%
13:Students' poor English language proficiency	N=0	N=3 7.8%	N=5 13.1%	N=18 47.3%	N=12 31.5%
14:Inadequate access to other sources (library, internet, books, articles, audio & visual facilities)	N=1 2.6%	N=6 15.7%	N=8 21%	N=16 42.1%	N=7 18.4%

Note: N= number of students %= percentages of responses

4. Results and Discussion

The first goal of this study was to identify the difficulties that the students experienced in learning academic writing and the possible factors behind them. Therefore, the first part of the questionnaire aimed to identify the major difficulties experienced by the students in academic writing.

1: Potential difficulties encountered by undergraduate students

Students' perceptions

To answer the first research question: What are the major academic writing difficulties encountered by Libyan students?, therefore, highest percentage of the students would be considered to represent the students' major academic writing difficulties.

It is obvious from table 1 that the average sample responses of the students towards academic writing difficulties varied conspicuously among students since the highest percentage N=22 (57.8%) of the students ranked statement three " I find it difficult to to provide a clear thesis statement in my writing" as the most difficult writing aspect for them to learn. Then came statement ten in the second place as around N=21 (55.2%) of the students indicated that " to distinguish types of genre in academic writing" was difficult for them. The results obtained also revealed that almost N=19

(50%) of the students reported that statement twelve "To provide a proper in-text citation in their writing (APA style)" was a real difficulty for them to learn. The other statements which posed real difficulties for students were 17, 8, 2, 9, 16, 18, 13, 7, 21, 1, 15, 19, 24 that ranked consecutively from fourth to the sixteenth rank as indicted by the number of students' responses and their percentages compared to the major difficulties they experienced, while the rest of the statement items representing difficulties (5,6,4, 11, 14, 20, and 22) constituted little or no challenge (posed little difficulty) in academic writing for the undergraduate participants.

Therefore, it has become clear from the data obtained from the first part of the questionnaire as shown in table 1 above that there were various results representing major difficulties for students and ,thus, were ranked as follows:

For example, statement three " I find it difficult to provide a clear thesis statement in my writing" was indicated by the students as the most difficult writing aspect for them to learn and it was the most effective difficulty based on the perceptions of the graduate participants. Then came statement ten in the second place as around N=21 (55.2%) of the students indicated that " to distinguish types of genre in academic writing" was a real difficulty for them.

From the students' perspective, the findings of the research indicated that the most difficult aspects students encounter in academic writing were "providing a clear and good thesis statement" and "deciding how to start writing" as major difficulties they encounter in academic writing. These results are in line with what was shown by many researchers including (Al-Samadani, 2010; Raza, 2015) which confirmed that what was mentioned above is one of the most important sources of difficulties that students experience in academic writing.

Another difficult aspect students experienced was "finding the accurate vocabulary to express their writing". The same issue was mentioned by other researchers in different contexts for instance, (Al-Khairy, 2013; Al-Mubarak, 2017; Aldabbus, 2017) as this difficulty could be due to the lack of teaching students vocabulary for academic purposes.

Moreover, students major difficulties in "providing sufficient main points and providing sufficient supporting points in their writing' were categorized as major difficulties for undergraduate students. This could be attributed to the fact that students didn't have enough background information about the topic and were not exposed to enough practice in writing a clear outline before creating the thesis statement.

In addition, the results showed that paraphrasing and summarizing relevant sources in the students' writing was another difficult aspect for the graduate students, followed by the students' inability to write coherent paragraphs. For university students, difficulty in deciding

how to start writing was among the major problems they encounter in academic writing. These results are in line with what was shown by many researchers, for example by (Al-Samadani, 2010; Raza, 2015) whose results confirmed that what was mentioned above is one of the most important sources of difficulties that students experience in academic writing

On the other hand, the findings revealed that undergraduate students have little or no difficulty in "using grammar and mechanics of writing such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization". This contrasts with what was reviewed in various research studies which confirmed that grammar and mechanics of writing are the major obstacles affecting the quality of the students' written assignments (Mubarak, 2017; Abdelkarim, 2013; Al Fadda, 2012). The findings of the study also showed that students did not seem to have difficulties in "writing introduction for their essays" nor had any difficulty" in providing clear conclusion in their writing".

On the whole, it can be concluded from the data obtained that the majority of the students who took part in this study experienced major difficulties in learning academic writing due to many factors resulting in real problems for them.

2:Potential factors behind students' academic writing difficulties

Students' perceptions

The aim of the second part of the questionnaire is to identify the factors behind the EFL students' academic writing difficulties.

To answer the second research question which is " What are the factors behind the EFL students' academic writing difficulties? ", therefore, highest percentage of the students would be considered to represent the most striking factors behind the EFL students' academic writing difficulties.

With regard to the potential factors behind the major difficulties, the majority of the students indicated that there were some factors that in their view caused real difficulties for them in learning academic writing.

It is clear from the previous table that there were various views according to the students' average responses. The data obtained revealed that almost N=18 (47.3%) of the students regarded statement 13 "Students' poor English language proficiency" as the main factor resulting in real difficulty in mastering academic writing.

With reference to statement fourteen that is " Inadequate access to resources (library, internet, books, articles, audio & visual facilities)", the results revealed that almost N=16 (42.1%) of the students marked statement 14 as the second biggest factor causing language difficulties. Followed by statement nine as around N=16 42.1% of the students believed that

"Ineffective teaching methods used by teachers" were among the main factors leading to academic writing difficulties.

Likewise, among other factors behind students' academic writing difficulties were found in statements ten, that is, " lack of writing practice opportunities in class room" and statement seven, that is, "insufficient number of academic writing courses" as almost N=15 39.4% of the students reported these among other possible reasons leading to learning difficulties.

Then came statement eleven, that is, "insufficient feedback and guidance provided from teachers" and statement one, that is, "overcrowded classrooms with students" as as some of the main factors as reported by N=13 34.2% of the students resulting in academic writing difficulties.

Among other factors came statement five, that is, Inadequate knowledge of academic jargons (lack of clear & proper explanation of the writing task or given examples) since N=12 (31.5%) of the students believed these factors were the reasons behind their writing difficulties, followed by other factors as in statement two, that is, the persistent use of first - language in generating ideas and statement eight, that is, "Ineffective academic writing courses" as indicted by N=11 28.9% of the students.

However, as for the rest of the statements representing possible factors (3, 4, 6 and 12), they seemed to have caused almost little or no difficulty in learning academic writing for students.

Based on these findings, it can be seen that there were real factors that led to language difficulties in learning academic writing as indicated by most students in this study.

Furthermore, it can be interpreted from the data obtained that the reasons why students experience real difficulties in learning academic writing were due to the nature of the teaching methods, teaching materials and the testing system used by their instructors which focused on the product rather than the process of writing.

Moreover, as for the main factors resulting in academic writing difficulties, the findings revealed that "Students' poor English language proficiency" was the main factor resulting in real difficulty in mastering academic writing.   lack of resources (books, articles, audio & visual facilities, ", followed by the lack of writing practice opportunities in classroom " was also one of the main factors that badly affected students to master academic writing. Although ineffective feedback and guidance provided by instructors were the main reasons behind their academic writing difficulties, most of the students agreed that lack of writing practice opportunities and lack of resources (books, articles, audio & visual facilities, online websites) were among the main factors that did not help them master the academic writing skills. The finding of this study was consistent with what was found by other researchers for example, (Aldabbus, 2017; Fadhel, 2017; Altaeb, 2018)

5. Conclusion & Suggestions

The purpose of this study was to identify the major difficulties that university students encounter in learning academic writing and the potential factors behind those difficulties. Therefore, A quantitative method was employed to collect the data for the study. The participants were 38 undergraduate students who took part in filling out the questionnaire of the study. The questionnaire was designed with 24 items to identify the major academic writing difficulties and 14 items were added to identify the potential factors behind these difficulties in order to collect the required data. The results of the study revealed that undergraduate students have experienced some major difficulties in academic writing. More specifically, difficulties in providing a clear thesis statement in their writing, distinguishing types of genre in academic writing, providing a proper in-text citation in my writing (APA style), using appropriate discourse markers in their writing to connect the sentences and writing coherent paragraphs were the most major difficulties, whereas almost no difficulties seemed to pose a challenge for students in "using grammar and mechanics of writing such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in their academic writing and that students did not seem to have difficulties in "writing introduction for their essays" nor had any difficulty" in providing clear conclusion in their writing".

Therefore, It can be deduced that the instructors 'teaching methods and the teaching materials employed seemed to focus on the end product rather than the process approach of teaching academic writing. Moreover, students' poor English language proficiency" was the main factor resulting in real difficulty in mastering academic writing and that Inadequate access to resources (library, internet, books, articles, audio & visual facilities)", inadequate and the " lack of writing practice opportunities in class room" and "insufficient number of academic writing courses" were the main reasons behind those major difficulties.

Therefore, in order to help students overcome those difficulties and master academic writing, writing teachers should provide students with most engaging and effective writing materials that are relevant to their needs. Writing teachers should also employ academic vocabulary books as supplementary materials to develop their students' academic vocabulary competence. Writing teachers should give more emphasis to the teaching of writing as a process including planning, writing, drafting, revising, and editing (Brown, 2001). Writing teachers should provide students with more writing practice opportunities in and outside classroom with guided and positive feedback. It is also important for the writing teachers to raise the learners' awareness of the importance of the writing strategies and encourage them to be independent writers in order to develop their academic writing proficiency. To sum up, the findings of this study will hopefully add new information to the new current research and provide insights to the writing teachers and writing materials developers to help learners overcome the writing difficulties they might experience. However, the findings

of this study cannot be generalized to the students of English as a foreign language due to the scope of the study and the small size of the sample.

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