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Students' Perceptions of Difficulties in Academic Writing in English: A Study of Secondary Schools in Duhok City

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Abstract

Academic writing in the English language is one of the most difficult challenges EFL students at secondary schools face; however, little research has been conducted on these issues in Duhok city of Iraq. This mixed-methods study investigates the specific difficulties

encountered by secondary school students in academic writing and examines educators' perspectives on these challenges. Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 72 students and semi-structured interviews with 23 teachers and analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The quantitative data results showed that translation and limited vocabulary are the main challenges, with 35% of students sometimes translating from their first language (L1) and 28% sometimes experiencing vocabulary difficulties. Tense usage, spelling errors, and the use of simple words instead of more complex ones were also emphasised as primary concerns.

While students highlighted translation, limited vocabulary, and tense usage, teachers noted complex words, grammar and spelling errors as greater concerns. Although educators and teachers agree that translation, grammatical rules, sentence structure, and voice usage need improvement, they also observed that students are less likely to make mistakes with capitalisation and passive and active voice usage.

Keywords: Academic writing, challenges, education, English language, students

تصورات الطلاب لصعوبات الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية: دراسة في المدارس الثانوية
في مدينة دهوك

حمزة زيباري

جامعة دهوك - كلية اللغات - قسم اللغة الانجليزية

و

سامان سليم جمعة

جامعة دهوك - كلية اللغات - قسم اللغة الانجليزية

و

داليا ديان نجيب

جامعة دهوك - كلية اللغات - قسم اللغة الانجليزية

و

ارين إسلام

جامعة دهوك - كلية اللغات - قسم اللغة الانجليزية

و

جيكري شكري

جامعة دهوك - كلية اللغات - قسم اللغة الانجليزية

و

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المستخلص

تُشكّل الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية أحد أهم التحديات التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية؛ ومع ذلك، لم يُولَ اهتمامٌ أكاديميٌّ كافٍ لهذا الموضوع في مدينة دهوك-العراق. تستكشف هذه الدراسة ذات المنهجيات المختلطة الصعوبات المحددة التي يواجهها طلاب المرحلة الثانوية في الكتابة الأكاديمية، وتبحث في وجهات نظر المدرسين حول هذه التحديات. جُمعت البيانات من خلال استبيان وُجّه إلى 72 طالبًا ومقابلات شبه منظّمة أُجريت مع 23 مدرسًا، ثم حُلّلت لاحقًا باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي والتحليل الموضوعي. أشارت النتائج الكميّة إلى أن الترجمة من اللغة الأولى (L1) وقلة المفردات تُمثّلان التحديين الرئيسيين، حيث أفاد 35% من الطلاب باعتمادهم أحيانًا على الترجمة من اللغة الأولى، بينما واجه 28% منهم صعوباتٍ منقطعةً تتعلق بالمفردات. كما حدّدت مشكلاتٍ إضافية، مثل سوء استخدام الأزمنة، والأخطاء الإملائية، واستبدال المفردات المعقدة بخيارات معجمية أبسط، كمخاوف بارزة.

بينما ذكر الطلاب في أغلب الأحيان الترجمة، والمفردات المحدودة، والصعوبات المتعلقة بالأزمنة، أعرب المدرسون عن قلق أكبر بشأن استخدام المفردات المعقدة، والدقة النحوية، وإتقان التهجئة. اتفق كل من المدرسين والطلاب على أن الترجمة، وإتقان القواعد النحوية، وبنية الجملة، واستخدام المبني للمعلوم والمجهول، أمورٌ تستحق التحسين. ومع ذلك، لوحظ أيضًا أن الطلاب يُظهرون أخطاءً أقل نسبيًا في استخدام الأحرف الكبيرة وفي استخدام المبني للمعلوم والمجهول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الأكاديمية، التحديات، التعليم، اللغة الإنجليزية، الطلاب

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

Academic writing in English is a critical skill for success in education and global communication, as it develops students' ability to think critically, organise ideas, and participate in scholarly discourse. In Duhok, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), strong writing skills are essential for students to succeed in national exams, higher education, and future careers. Despite the Kurdistan Region of Iraq introducing the *Sunrise* curriculum in 1991 to improve English skills (Sofi-Karim, 2015), many students still face significant challenges, including limited vocabulary, translation from first language (L1), weak grammar, and difficulty organising ideas.

The problem addressed in this study is that there is limited research exploring secondary school students' own perception of the difficulties they face in academic writing in Duhok City. Previous studies in other contexts have identified common barriers, such as inadequate practice, insufficient feedback, and limited exposure to academic text, but little is known about how these challenges manifest in the local setting. This study fills that gap by examining the perspectives of both students and teachers, providing insights that can guide targeted interventions in curriculum design and classroom practice.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study contributes to the body of literature on EFL academic writing by offering insights from the under-researched context of secondary schools in Duhok City, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It enriches existing theories on language learning challenges by highlighting students' perspectives on specific writing difficulties, providing a basis for further comparative and cross-cultural research.

Besides the theoretical significance, the findings of this research would also have practical significance in terms of direct implications for educational practice and policy. The findings would help educators and policymakers identify students' main writing challenges, guide curriculum developers in designing targeted interventions, encourage the adoption of adaptable student-centred teaching approaches, and inform strategies to improve students' writing performance, confidence and overall academic outcomes.

1.3 Questions of the Research

We have developed the following questions to achieve the specified objectives:

- a) What are the most frequent writing challenges commonly faced by secondary school students?
- b) What are the perspectives of English language teachers regarding the challenges in teaching writing skills at the secondary level?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research explores secondary school students' perceptions of academic writing difficulties in the English language in Duhok City, aiming to provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers, specifically:

1. Understanding students' challenges: the study on students' perceptions of academic writing difficulties in Duhok City secondary schools provides valuable insights into the challenging aspects of students' writing, helping educators and policymakers better support students in developing their writing skills.
2. Informing curriculum developers: findings will guide curriculum developers and instruction strategists in addressing difficulties and facilitating the design of effective interventions.

3. Enhancing teaching practices: by understanding the perspectives of both students and teachers, this study aims to improve teaching methods in English language classrooms in Kurdistan, particularly, and globally, by promoting adaptability and student support.

4. Improving student performance: this research can inform interventions to enhance academic writing performance, enabling students to overcome obstacles, boost confidence, and improve educational outcomes.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language, such as English, is a continuous process that requires sustained efforts and interest from EFL learners (Mitchell et al., 2013; Bandpay, 2012). Moreover, Halliday (2003) suggests that studying writing skills could be crucial for EFL learners, as it enables them to memorise better and use their English knowledge when necessary. However, writing is a productive skill in English that is a very challenging, demanding, and complicated task for EFL learners and native English speakers. Therefore, it is widely believed that EFL learners are highly likely to make errors when it comes to writing (Tsai & Lin, 2012).

Studies exploring the L1/L2 distinction have helped uncover several essential differences in the discourse produced by second language (L2) English writers from various L1 backgrounds (Chen & Baker, 2010; Paquot, 2014). However, further studies are needed to identify and verify previously highlighted production tendencies using more closely comparable corpora to distinguish between L1-related and universal features of L2 English writing. This is because issues of corpus comparability have become a growing concern in recent years, which is seen as limiting the accurate identification of distinguishing features that may be markers of L1 background (e.g., Appel & Szeib, 2018; Pan et al., 2016).

The Kurdish people, an Indo-European ethnolinguistic group in Iraq, have a positive attitude towards the English language, and English is more highly appreciated. Since achieving autonomy in 1991, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has taken dramatic steps toward educational development and reform, including opening several new universities and schools, designing new curricula, and passing new educational legislation. However, KRI's educational system encounters some constraints, particularly its English programme (Sofi-Karim, 2015).

The presence of English has indeed increased steadily since the beginning of 2013. Along with its increased visibility, its status has changed dramatically. The period from 1991 to 2003, a time of significant social, cultural, and political change, was critical in this process. Until 2007, all students in Kurdistan began learning English in elementary school at approximately 11 years old (grade 5). In September 2007, the Ministry of Education held the second conference, concluding with Resolution No. 211, which mandated that English be taught even in kindergartens (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Since the 1970s, the English curriculum in Iraq has consisted of English for Iraq books 6, 7, and 8, the content of which focuses on dialogues, grammar, sounds, and exercises. However, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (2007) developed a new English language curriculum called Sunrise for secondary and high schools, focusing on four essential skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. (Amin, 2017). Nevertheless, the KRI had taken steps to raise primary and secondary education to international standards, including implementing the K-12 curriculum and making education compulsory through 9th grade, unlike before, when it was mandatory only up to and through 6th grade. Primary education in Kurdistan spans grades 1 through 9. In contrast, secondary education is between grades 10 and 12. Duhok, a city in Kurdistan, follows the same programme directed by the Ministry of Education of Kurdistan (Abdul-Kareem, 2009).

2.2 Advantages of Writing English as an L2

Writing is a fundamental skill taught in schools, progressing from the introduction of the alphabet and numbers to sentence formation, grammar, and vocabulary. Each student should acquire writing skills. It is a form of communication necessary for education and any profession (Rae, 2020).

There are many ways that can help students improve their writing skills. They are using images in textbooks to teach English in primary schools in Pakistan. Through class observations and interviews as part of a Pakistan study, the researchers found that while pictures are helpful, teachers often need to use them more effectively. The study suggests that teachers can make lectures more engaging and fruitful by incorporating these images (Hussain & Khan, 2022).

Written language has become a significant social and educational tool with high prestige. Its structure has evolved from being seen as an imperfect substitute for spoken language to being studied by linguists like Pulgram and Berry. However, writing knowledge and skills should be addressed due to their perceived importance as a linguistic skill in elementary schools.

Writing is essential and brings about many advantages, and it helps to

- a) express one's personality;
 - b) foster communication;
 - c) develop thinking skills;
 - d) make logical and persuasive arguments;
 - e) give a person a chance to later reflect on his/her ideas and re-evaluate them;
 - f) provide and receive feedback, and prepare for school and employment
- (Klimova, 2012).

2.3 Previous Studies

Many researchers have investigated how students perceive the challenges they face in academic writing in English. A study by Byrne (1988) identified difficulties in content

(physiology), language use and vocabulary (linguistics), and organisation and mechanics (cognition). Students' difficulties varied according to their writing test scores.

Similarly, Dash, Mahana & Mishra (2021) researched the writing problems in secondary school students in the English language in India, and the results showed that most students face difficulties in the use of correct tenses every time, and the majority of them do not use their first language to help with word selection. At the same time, students struggle with simple sentences in English. Ceylan (2019) also examined students' perceptions of difficulties in second writing. It was found that students often lack basic writing strategies. It was also highlighted that students need training in writing strategies.

Another study by Cheng (2004) investigated the research of National Taiwan Normal University students, utilising primary data collected from participants through open-ended questionnaires, writing assignments, and in-depth interviews. Cheng's findings on the results and discussions showed that teachers should give students the freedom to choose their topic or interest. Besides that, teachers should motivate students to learn to write by creating relaxed communication with the students, without worrying about making mistakes.

These researchers have investigated academic writing difficulties across various countries, highlighting diverse situations that motivate our exploration of students' perceptions in Duhok City.

However, although these studies have explored academic writing difficulties in various cultural and educational contexts, there is a lack of research specifically focusing on secondary school students in Duhok City, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition to that, this study includes a comprehensive understanding from both students and teachers to address challenges in academic writing. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the specific challenges encountered by secondary school students in Duhok city and, moreover, shed light on educators' insights, which will provide valuable context-specific knowledge and practical implications for this under-researched region.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews which were analysed to gain insights into the challenges students face. Nine multiple-choice questions made up the questionnaire, which was given to 72 students chosen from various secondary schools in Duhok City. To aid with demographic analysis, questions about gender were included. The sample size was determined based on the selection of participants and schools provided by the General Directorate of Education of Duhok city, ensuring a representative sample from various secondary schools and different zones. In addition, 23 teachers selected from the same secondary schools as the survey respondents were interviewed and asked five short-answer questions.

Participants were given a thorough explanation of the study's goal prior to their participation, and their freely informed consent was acquired. Throughout the entire data-gathering process, the researchers took precautions to guarantee the participants' identity and confidentiality.

All things considered, this mixed-methods approach made it possible to thoroughly examine how students and teachers in Duhok City's secondary schools perceive the difficulties associated with academic writing in the English language.

3.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a useful research tool that gathers data from respondents by using a series of questions or prompts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The current study used a mixed-methods approach to examine how students at two secondary schools in Duhok City perceived the difficulties they faced when writing academically in English. Data was extracted from the questionnaire using a descriptive statistics methodology.

Students had to select one response from a specially created questionnaire that had nine multiple-choice questions. The objective was to collect quantitative data on students' experiences. The questionnaire items were inspired by ideas from Dash et al. (2021); the questionnaire is presented in the appendix. One question focused on gender for demographic analysis, with 57% of participants identifying as female and 43% as male, as shown in Figure 1.

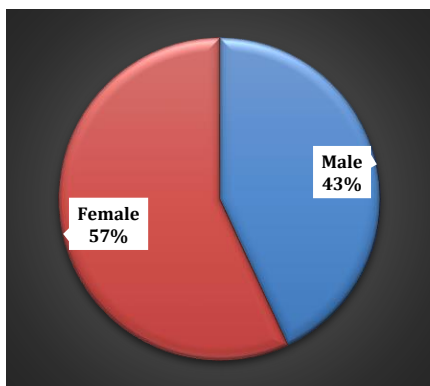


Figure 1: Students' Gender

3.3 Interviews

The secondary school teachers from the different schools participated voluntarily in the interviews. The interviews included 23 teachers who participated; 43% were male and 57% were female. As shown in the figure below.

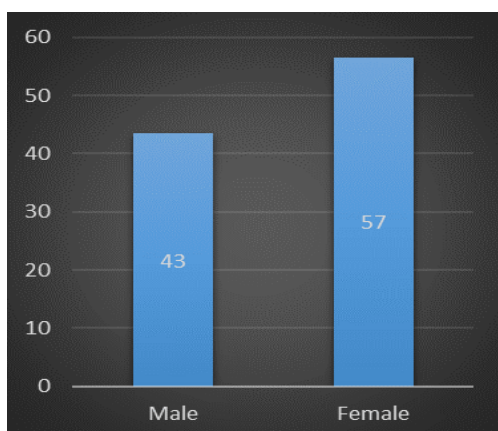


Figure 2: Teachers' Gender

Most of the teachers spoke Kurdish as their first language (96%), and a small minority spoke Arabic (4%), as shown in Figure 3.

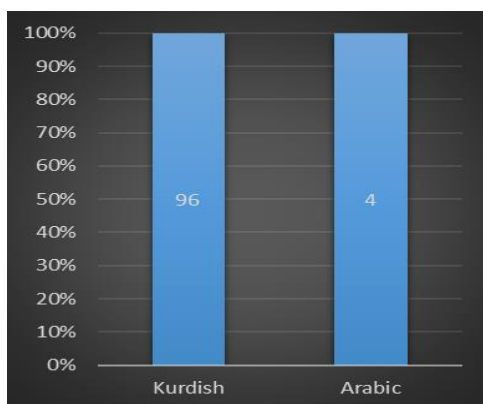


Figure 3: Teachers' Native Language

Their teaching experience differed: 21.7% had 1-5 years of experience, 8.7% had 5-10 years, 34.8% had 10-15 years, and 34.8% had more than 15 years of teaching experience. The interview aimed to gather qualitative information and instructors' viewpoints regarding students' English writing instruction.

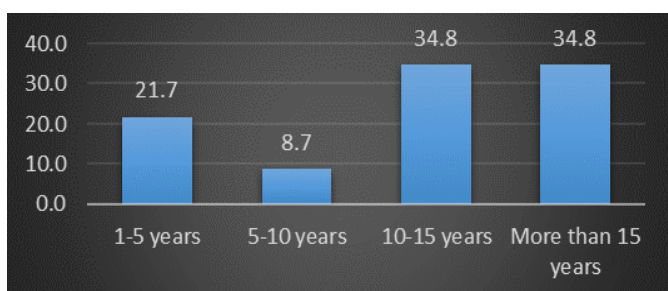


Figure 4: Teachers' Years of Experience

Each interview lasted between ten and fifteen minutes, with five questions. The questions were designed to aid the researcher in recognising and understanding English-language writing. All participants were told about the study's goal, and participation was completely voluntary before the interview began.

3.4 Procedures

Data collection was from February to July 2024. First, approval was obtained from the General Directorate of Education of Duhok City to access secondary schools. A list of selected schools was provided, and the questionnaire was distributed to 72 students across these schools. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with 23 teachers who volunteered from the same schools where the questionnaire was administered. To ensure consistency, all participants received a clear explanation of the study's objectives and were given the same instructions. The interviews were conducted using a standardised set of five questions to reduce interview bias. Participants' confidentiality and voluntary participation were strictly maintained throughout the process.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

4.1 Questionnaire

In this study, the researchers collected data through the questionnaire consisting of nine multiple-choice questions, administered voluntarily to 72 students from diverse secondary schools in Duhok City. The questionnaire was designed thematically, beginning with background information, followed by questions to address specific academic writing difficulties, ensuring a clear and logical sequence.

In response to the first question, 'Do you face difficulty using correct tenses?' Among the 72 respondents, 42% rarely encountered difficulties, followed by 28% who reported never facing such challenges, 26% who sometimes faced such problems, and 3% and 1% who said they frequently and always faced such issues, respectively. This is shown in Figure 5.

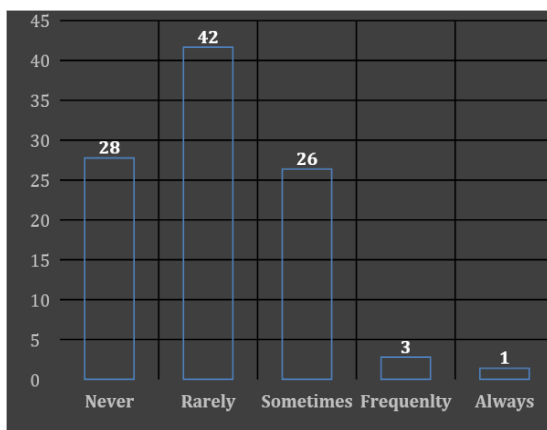


Figure 5: Correct Tense Use

Regarding the question ‘Do you use simpler words to replace more complex ones?’, respondents exhibited diverse preferences. 29% of the respondents rarely replaced complex words, 24% did so sometimes, and 18% always opted for simpler alternatives. In contrast, 15% never replaced complex words, and 14% frequently did. Respondents preferred to use simpler, everyday words rather than complex ones. Figure 6 below shows the varying preferences among respondents.

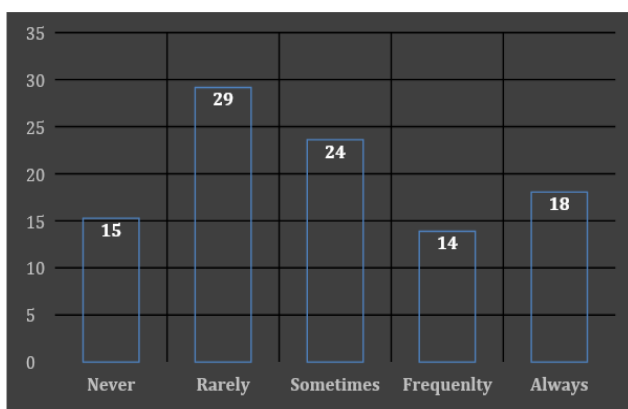


Figure 6: Simple Words Replacing More Complex Ones

When students were asked if they “translate sentences from L1 to English”, respondents varied. 35% of respondents reported that they sometimes translate sentences, 24% never do, 15% do it frequently, 14% rarely engage in translation from L1 to English, and only 12% always translate sentences from L1 to English, as depicted in Figure 7.

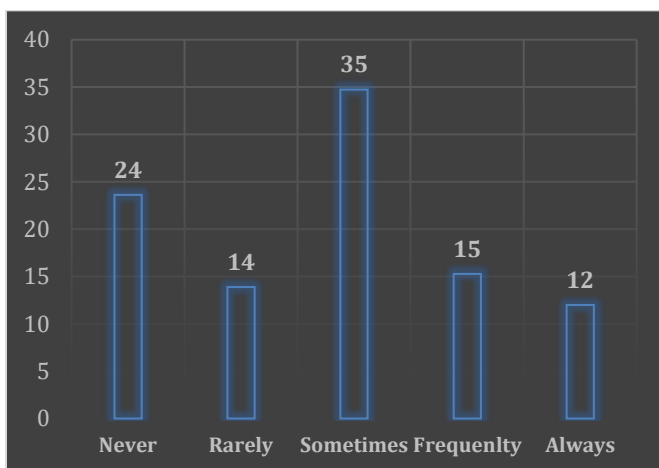


Figure 7: Translate Sentences from L1 to English

Regarding the question, ‘Do you lengthen sentences due to difficulty finding the right words?’ 33% of respondents reported that they never lengthen sentences, 28% answered

‘rarely’, 18% answered ‘sometimes’, 14% answered ‘frequently’, and only 7% answered ‘always’. This is illustrated in Figure 8.

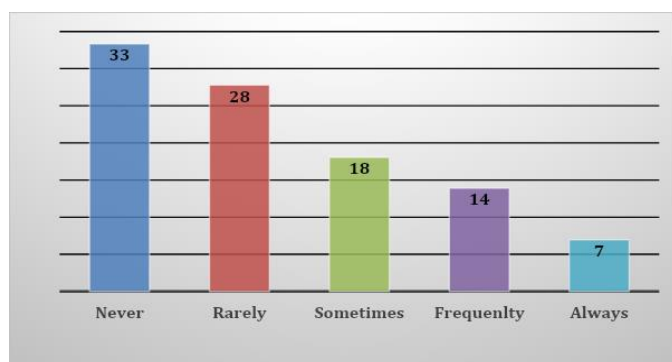


Figure 8: Lengthen Sentences Due to Difficulty Finding the Right Words.

When students were asked if they find difficulties in using passive voice in writing, the results showed that 36% rarely face difficulties, 26% never do, 22% sometimes encounter challenges, 13% always face problems, and only 3% do so frequently, as illustrated in Figure 9.

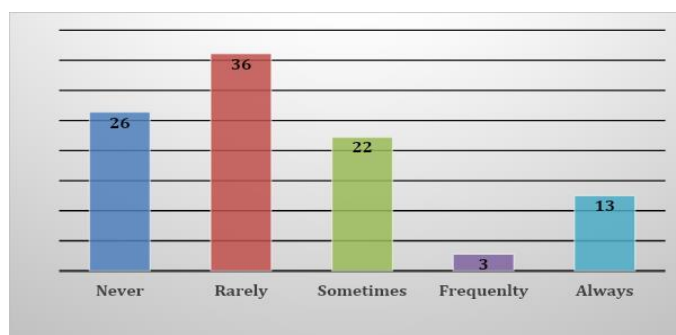


Figure 9: Challenges in Passive Voice

The respondents to whether students apply grammar rules while writing essays revealed that 32% never do that, 19% do so sometimes, 17% do it frequently, and 17% always apply grammar rules. Only 15% said they rarely apply grammar rules, as illustrated in Figure 10 below.

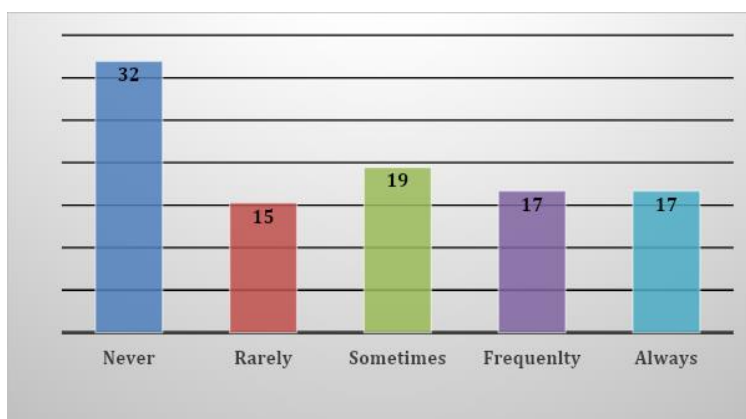


Figure 10: Applying Grammar Rules

The analysis of whether students have difficulty in writing due to limited vocabulary revealed that the highest percentage, which is 28%, indicated 'sometimes', followed by 24% who said 'never', 21% 'rarely', 18% 'frequently', and 10% 'always'. This information is shown in Figure 11.

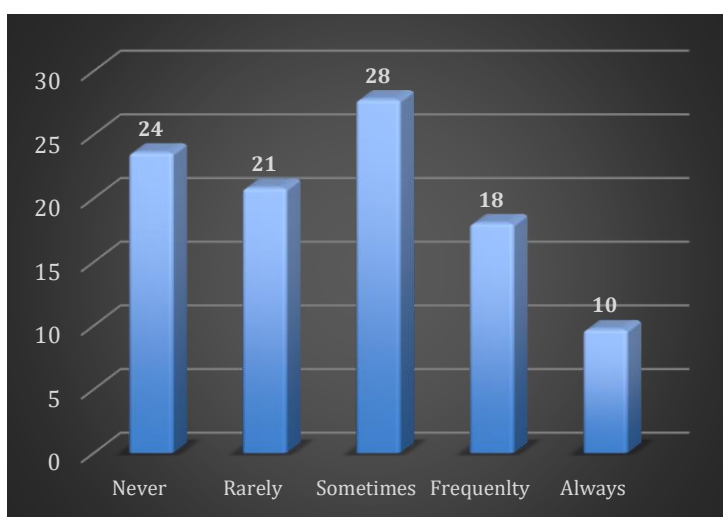


Figure 11: Difficulty in Writing Due to Limited Vocabulary

When participants were asked if they make spelling errors in English, the results showed that the majority, 47%, indicated that they rarely make spelling errors, 25% sometimes, 10% never, 10% always, and the lowest rate, which was 8%, said they frequently make spelling errors; see Figure 12.

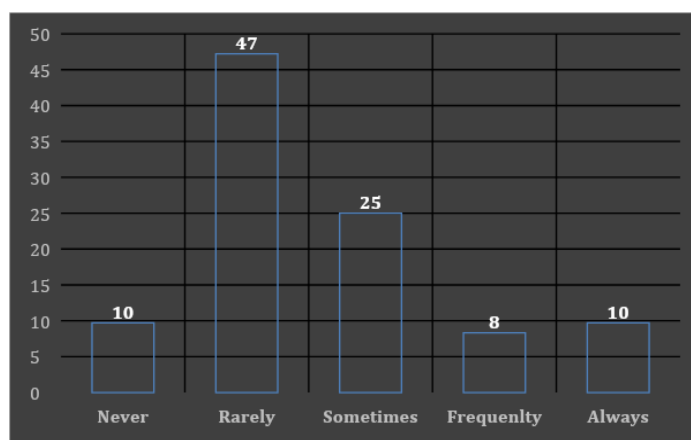


Figure 12: Spelling Errors

Students were asked if they make capitalisation and punctuation errors; the responses showed that the majority, 51%, said they never do that, 19% rarely, 18% sometimes, 7% answered ‘frequently’, and 4% always. It is shown in Figure 13.

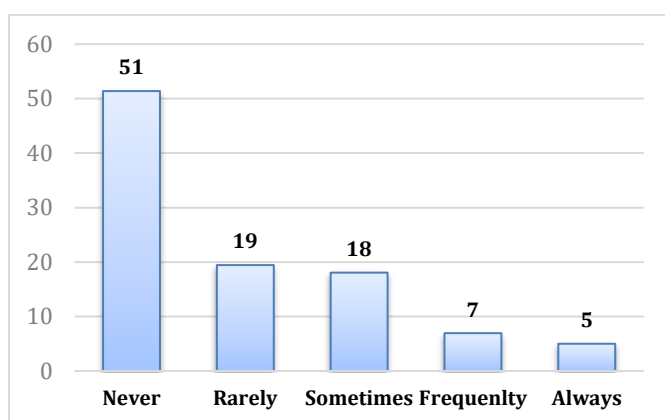


Figure 13: Capitalisation and Punctuation Errors

The results indicated that students' most common challenges in academic writing are translating sentences from L1 into English and writing due to limited vocabulary; another challenge is spelling errors. The other challenges students face in writing include using tenses correctly and replacing complex words with simpler ones to convey their point of view. While these challenges are prominent, it is worth noting that issues such as applying grammar rules, lengthening sentences due to difficulty finding the right words, difficulties in passive and active voice forms, and capitalisation and punctuation errors appear to be less prevalent among students.

The findings from the questionnaire reflect various English proficiency levels, with frequent L1 translation and vocabulary challenges indicating limited language exposure. Meanwhile, fewer punctuation and capitalisation errors may result from clearer instructions or simpler rules.

4.2 Interviews

In exploring students' challenges in academic writing in English at secondary schools in Duhok City, the insights provided by 23 English teachers through semi-structured interviews offer valuable perspectives. Through a series of 5 short-answer questions, these educators shed light on students' difficulties in English language writing. This section explores the findings from these interviews, aiming to identify common themes and nuances that illuminate the challenges students face in academic writing. For the calculation of the numbers below and the percentages, the frequency counts were collected based on how many times each teacher mentioned a particular difficulty in which they could select more than one from the predefined list provided in the interview questions (see Appendix 2).

When the teachers were asked about challenges students face in academic writing, their perspectives revealed a predominant concern with spelling errors, identified by 28% of the respondents. Following closely are correct tense use, vocabulary, and grammar rules, each highlighted by 17%; punctuation and capitalisation pose challenges at 13%, while thinking in the native language (L1) is a concern for 6%. Additionally, only 2% emphasised the issue of repetition of the same idea as a challenge in students' academic writing, as illustrated in Figure 14 below.

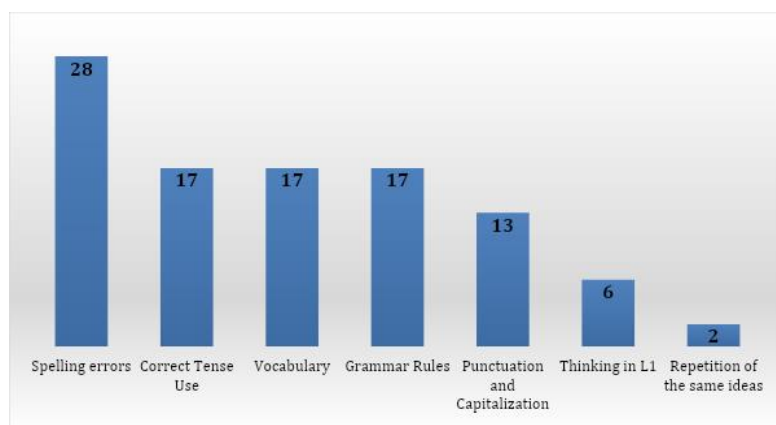


Figure 14: Teachers' Perspective on Challenges Students Face in Academic Writing

When teachers were asked to identify prevalent challenges in students' academic writing, the critical difficulties chosen by educators ranked highest at fifteen times for complex words, followed by fourteen times for both spelling errors and grammar rules, ten times for tenses, eight times for capitalisation and punctuation errors, and three times for lack of vocabulary. The findings highlight the subjective choices made by teachers regarding the challenges students face in their academic writing. Complex words emerged as the most common challenge, while a lack of vocabulary was noted as the least common hurdle, as illustrated in Figure 15 below.

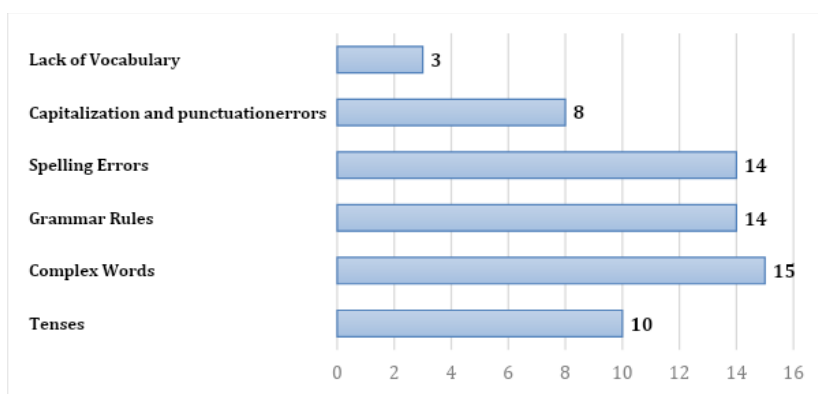


Figure 15: Teachers' Ranking of Student Writing Difficulties

When we asked teachers about their opinions on the emphasis placed on English academic writing skills in secondary schools, most teachers stated that there needs to be more emphasis on these skills. Teachers commonly express concerns about the lack of focus on developing students' academic writing abilities in secondary education. They often highlight that other subjects or standardised testing precede nurturing strong writing skills. This could lead students to graduate without strong academic writing abilities, which are essential for success in both further education and the workforce, and may result from this lack of focus.

According to the findings, students frequently require assistance with academic writing because of difficulties converting phrases from their native tongue into English and a lack of vocabulary. Using simpler terms to convey their ideas instead of more complicated ones is another difficulty. Students may require assistance with spelling and using tenses. Students were less likely to struggle with capitalisation, punctuation, expanding sentences, and alternating between the passive and active voice than they were with applying grammar rules.

4.3 Results Discussion

A coherent understanding emerges from analysing the difficulties associated with academic writing from the perspectives of both students and teachers in Duhok City secondary schools. Regarding translation, tense usage, spelling mistakes, limited vocabulary, complex words, and vocabulary restrictions, students' opinions coincide with those of teachers. Students specifically draw attention to challenges with translation and vocabulary, which is consistent with what teachers have observed, although they highlight complex words as the main concern. Teachers' Recognition of difficulties in employing such complicated language is in line with the need for students to simplify complex vocabulary.

Examining students' perspectives reveals that translation and vocabulary are significant obstacles. However, students also mention spelling mistakes and improper tense usage. Teachers often highlight complex words as a common challenge. Notably, students perceive issues like applying grammar rules, sentence lengthening, navigating passive and active voice, and addressing capitalisation and punctuation errors as less prevalent than

those reported by teachers. From the teachers' perspectives, the importance of addressing challenges in using complex words is strongly emphasised, aligning with students' experiences with limited vocabulary. Grammar rules, sentence lengthening, passive and active voice, capitalisation, and punctuation errors seem less noticeable to students than to teachers, and this comparison between the questionnaire results and interview findings demonstrates the value of understanding both teacher and student viewpoints comprehensively, as it is crucial for developing tailored strategies to address these challenges in Duhok City secondary schools.

Our findings align with Bryne's (1988) categorisation of writing difficulties in content, language use, and organisation, as tense misuse and vocabulary gaps in our data reflect his focus on grammatical accuracy and lexical range. Dash et al. (2021) similarly identified tense errors as a major issue among secondary students, echoing our results. Ceylan (2019) calls for explicit training in writing strategies to also resonate, as both students and teachers in our study stressed the need for support with complex vocabulary and sentence construction. Likewise, Cheng (2004) emphasises learner autonomy in topic choice and reducing writing anxiety, suggesting ways to address the motivation and accuracy challenges we observed.

Theoretically, our results can be understood through Second Language Acquisition (SLA) frameworks (Ellis, 1994), where limited authentic input and output opportunities lead to fossilised tense and syntax errors. Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) explains how processing grammar, vocabulary, and ideas overloads working memory, sustaining difficulties with complex vocabulary and tense control. Error Analysis theory (Corder, 1967) frames these as both interlingual transfer from Kurdish and intralingual developmental errors common in EFL learning contexts (Selinker, 1972).

These findings have clear implications for curriculum, teacher training, and policy. Curriculum designers should include scaffolded writing tasks that build complex vocabulary and reinforce grammar (Nation, 2009). Teacher training must focus on constructive feedback and fostering learner autonomy (Hyland & Huland, 2006). Policy-wise, investing in teaching resources, smaller classes, and increased writing practice is needed to tackle systemic challenges (Richard & Rodgers, 2014).

In summary, this comparative analysis of student and teacher perspectives, grounded in literature and theory, lays the groundwork for targeted interventions.

Chapter 5

5.1 Conclusions

In conclusion, the study on secondary school students' perceptions of the problems they encounter when writing academically in the English language has shed important light on the difficulties that both students and teachers face in this setting. The study, which involved data collection from 72 students and 23 teachers over a year, highlights significant obstacles, including translation from L1, limited vocabulary, tense misuse, spelling errors, and challenges with complex vocabulary. These issues notably hinder students' proficiency in academic writing. The findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions and

support systems to enhance students' academic writing skills and improve the overall learning environment in Duhok City secondary schools.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the understanding of academic writing challenges in a Kurdish EFL context, providing valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers aiming to tailor effective teaching practices and resources to this context.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed for educators, scientific institutions, curriculum planners, and policymakers.

1. Teachers should provide explicit instruction on avoiding direct translation from L1 and offer targeted practice in constructing original English sentences, addressing the major challenge of translation.
2. To tackle limited vocabulary and complex word usage, schools should implement vocabulary-building activities integrated across subjects, while curriculum planners should strengthen grammar and spelling modules with regular assessments.
3. Teacher training programmes should focus on effective corrective feedback strategies that encourage learner autonomy, helping students improve grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure skills.
4. Policy should invest in resources such as smaller class sizes and additional teaching materials to support individualised learning and better address persistent writing difficulties.
5. Further research could evaluate these interventions' effectiveness and explore gender-specific challenges to further refine academic writing support.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Dear Participants,

As college students majoring in English at the English Department, College of Languages, University of Duhok, we embark on a research endeavour for our graduation project. Our study, titled "Student Perceptions of Difficulties in Academic Writing in English Language at Secondary Schools in Duhok City", aims to delve into students' difficulties in their English writing endeavours.

Your sincere and candid input is vital to the success of our study. This questionnaire is not an exam; there are no right or wrong answers. We seek your personal experiences and perceptions to understand comprehensively the difficulties encountered in writing.

Participation in this questionnaire is voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue at any point. Rest assured, your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality in adherence to ethical research standards.

Researchers:

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Gender

- a. Male
- b. Female

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
1.	Difficulty in the use of correct tenses					
2.	Use of simpler words to replace more complex ones					
3.	Translating sentences from L1 to English					
4.	Lengthening sentences due to difficulty finding the right words					
5.	Challenges in using passive voice in writing					
6.	Applying grammar rules when writing essays					
7.	Difficulty in writing due to limited vocabulary					
8.	Spelling errors in English					
9.	Capitalisation and punctuation errors					

Appendix 2: Interview sheet

Participants,

As college students majoring in English at the Department of English, College of Languages, University of Duhok, we embark on a research endeavour for our graduation project. Our study, titled "Student Perceptions of Difficulties in Academic Writing in English Language at Secondary Schools in Duhok City," aims to delve into students' difficulties in their English writing endeavours.

Your sincere and candid input is vital to the success of our study. This interview is not an exam; there are no right or wrong answers. We seek your personal experiences and perceptions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties students encounter in writing.

Participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue at any point. Rest assured, your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality in adherence to ethical research standards.

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1. Information:

1.	Gender	
2.	Your native language	

2. How many years have you been teaching English?

a) 1-5 years

b) 5-10 years

c) 10-15 years

d) More than 15 years

3. In your experience, what are the primary challenges that students face when writing in English? List the difficulties

a. Correct Tense Use

b. Thinking in L1

c. Vocabulary

d. Grammar Rules

e. Spelling errors

f. Capitalisation and punctuation errors

g. Others

4. Rank the following writing difficulties based on their frequency among your students from most common to least common:

a. Tenses

b. Complex words

- c. Grammar rules
- d. Tenses
- e. Spelling errors
- f. Capitalisation and punctuation errors
- g. Lack of Vocabulary

5. In your opinion, how much emphasis is placed on English academic writing skills in the secondary school curriculum?

پوخته

نځيسانا ته كادمي ب زمانې ټنگليزې ټيكن ژر هڅه تر ټولو ټاكنه ننگين فېرخوازيڼ زمانې ټنگليزې يه وهك زمانه كې بياني كو فېرخواز ل قوتابخانه يېن نافه ندى رووبروو دبني؛ و ژماره كا كيم يا فه كوليان لسره فان ټاريشان ل باژيري دهوكي ي عيرافي هاتينه نه نجامدان. نه ف فه كولينه يا خودي ريبازه كا تيكله ف كوليني لسره وان ټاريشن تايهت دكهت يېن كو فېرخوازيڼ قوناغا نافه ندى د نځيسانا ته كادمي دا رووبروو دبني، و بيروبوچوونېن ماموستايان ژي لسره فان ټاكنه ننگين دښت ف كوليني. داتا هاتنه كومكرن بريكا رابرسيه كې كو لسره ۷۲ قوتابيان هاتينه به لافكرن و ديداريڼ نيمچه پيكله تي دگهل ۲۳ ماموستايان و نه و داتايه بريكا بكاريڼانا ټامارېن وهسكري و شيكاريابه تي هاتنه هه لسه ننگاندن. نه نجاميڼ پيژانينيڼ چه ندايه تي وهسا دياردكهن كو زمان وهگريڼ و سنورداري په يقان ټاكنه ننگين هره سهره كې نه، نه و ژي بريځا ۳۵٪ قوتاي هندك جاران وهگريڼ ژ زمانې خوي ټيكني (1L) دكهن ، و ۲۸٪ هندك جارا رووبروي ټاكنه ننگيا په يقان دبني. بكاريڼانا ده مي، و خه له تيا رنځيسي، و بكاريڼانا په يقيڼ ساده ل شويڼا په يقيڼ ټالوزتر وهك نيگه رانيه سهره كې جهخت لسره هاتيه كرن.

ل ده مي كو قوتابيان تيشك ټيخته سهر زمان وهگريڼ، و سنورداري په يقان، و بكاريڼانا ده مي، ماموستايان په يقيڼ ټالوز، و خه له تيڼ ريزماني و رنځيسي وهك نيگه رانييڼ مه زتر ده ستنيشانكرن. زيده باري كو ماموستا دوي باوهري دانه كو پيدفيه ياسايڼ ريزماني، و پيكله تي رستي، و شيوازي نه ري و نه ري ي رستي بهيڼه باشتركرن، به لي نه و دبيني كو قوتاي كيمتر خه له تيا د پيڼيڼ مه زن و بكاريڼانا ده نكي پاسف و نه كتف دا دكهن.