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Academic Writing Difficulties of Writing Essays for ESP among Students of Faculty of Computer Technology: Azzawia

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Abstract

Writing in English is a significant challenge for students of information Technology who study English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This study examines common writing difficulties faced by IT students in the Faculty of Computer in Azzawia, Libya, focusing on grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and technical terminology. Using qualitative content analysis, students written assignments were analyzed to identify recurring patterns and errors. The findings reveal that students struggle with sentence structure, appropriate use of vocabulary related to IT, and over all organization of idea. These challenges affect their ability to communicate effectively in academic and professional settings. The study suggests target instructional strategies to improve students' writing skills and bridge the gap between technical knowledge and linguistic proficiency.

Keywords: Professional, Purposes, Specific, Syntax, Critical thinking, Coherence & cohesion, Proofreading.

الكتابة الأكاديمية وصعوبات كتابة المقالات باللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة لدى طلاب كلية تقنية الحاسوب: الزاوية

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الملخص

تُمثل الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية تحديًا كبيرًا للطلاب الذين يدرسون تكنولوجيا المعلومات في كلية الزاوية لتقنية الحاسوب ويدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة. تتناول هذه الدراسة صعوبات الكتابة الشائعة التي يواجهها طلاب تكنولوجيا المعلومات في كلية تقنية الحاسوب: الزاوية، حيث تم التركيز على القواعد والمفردات والترابط اللغوي والمصطلحات التقنية. باستخدام تحليل نوعي للمحتوى، وقد خلُلت واجبات الطلاب الكتابية لتحديد الأنماط والأخطاء المتكررة. كشفت النتائج أن الطلاب يواجهون صعوبات في بناء الجمل، والاستخدام المناسب للمفردات المتعلقة بتكنولوجيا المعلومات، وتنظيم الأفكار بشكل عام. تؤثر هذه التحديات على قدرتهم على التواصل بفعالية في البيئات الأكاديمية والمهنية. تقترح الدراسة استراتيجيات تعليمية مُحددة لتحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى الطلاب وسد الفجوة بين المعرفة التقنية والكفاءة اللغوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهني، أغراض، خاص، قواعد نحوية، التفكير النقدي، التناسق والتماسك، تدقيق لغوي.

1- Introduction

There has been a growing interest in academic writing skills due to their important role in English for Specific purposes ESP. Bjork and Raisan (1997) argue that educators should highlight the importance of writing skills in all university curricula not only because of its immediate practical application but because they believe, that writing is a thinking tool. It is a tool for language development, for critical thinking and extension for all disciplines.

Abdoulkareem (2013) indicates that " non-native speakers of the English language should be familiar with writing process, elements, and features like formality, objectivity and complexity in order to use the language precisely and accurately" (p. 1). He also pointed out that writing clears the path for the students to think critically and motivate them to learn certain features like using strong vocabulary

to express their thoughts effectively. He says, "Academic writing can be characterized as the construction of techniques taught in universities such as organizing and generating students; ideas and critical thinking, and developing vocabulary and grammatical syntax" (p. 2). He also indicates that critical thinking in writing involves providing appropriate and sufficient argument and examples, choosing precise appropriate terms, clear transition from one thought to another to make the piece of writing logic and persuasive. Quitadamo, et al (2007) also indicate that as a set of cognitive abilities, critical thinking skills provide students with tangible academic, personal, and professional benefits. They see writing as an instrumental method that has long been perceived as a way to improve critical thinking.

Hence, the teaching of writing is important to encourage critical thinking and analysis. The process of writing requires many skills that are essential in modern life such as developing arguments, organizing thoughts, and evaluating information. Because of the way that world is moving, there is a need to think critically.

Additionally, English for specific purposes (ESP) has gained prominence in the field of language education, focusing on the unique linguistic needs of learners in specific professional or academic contexts. While ESP aims to equip students with the necessary language skills for their particular fields, many learners encounter writing difficulties that can affect the process of writing. Generally, students should be involved in more writing lessons that expose them to writing features. This approach supports their ability to make strong vocabularies, construct flawless grammar structures, and organize well-arranged paragraphs. Teachers should emphasize on the process of writing and the product. According to Mateus. (2017), they have to encourage the students to increase the awareness of academic writing features to enhance their writing confidence such as : clarity, coherence, style, audience awareness, purpose, grammar and vocabulary, creativity, research and evidence, structure, revision and editing. By engaging in these structured writing exercises, students can enhance their overall writing skills, aligning with the need for comprehensive writing education.

In an attempt to raise the writing level of IT students and to find the most effective method to improve them in this subject, this study seeks to identify frequent writing issues that IT students encounter,

with an emphasis on technical terminology, grammar, vocabulary, and consistency.

2- Literature review

Mastering-Writing skills improves academic competence and performance since many subjects require written assignments, which need good writing skills. That will result positively on the students' grades. Aiblu and Madanu (2023) states that students of English at Faculty of Education in Misurata University has committed many mistakes in their writing (Grammar mistakes – Punctuation mistakes – poor organization or illogical sequence). They examined 25 exam scripts of the first writing course. Their aim is to explore writing problems that face these students. They indicated that most of the students are incapable of writing full complete paragraph. They use familiar vocabularies, commit grammar mistakes, and produce ill structured paragraphs. They recommended that the teachers should take responsibility for implementing remedial procedures to enhance students' performance and minimize errors. Providing brief grammar rules to help students recognize and avoid mistakes. Additionally, it is important to help students in memorizing frequently used words as individual entities to improve their overall language skills.

Similarly, Farhasani et al (2023) discusses the challenges faced by ESP students in essay writing. Their study used a qualitative method; looking at 30 essays written by students from various study programs. They found that many students struggle with critical thinking skills, affecting both their writing quality and organization ideas. In addition, students overlook essay organization leading to unclear thesis statement and topic sentences. Their study also highlights six main problems in essay writing: plagiarism, grammatical errors, punctuation, poor word choice, lack of critical thinking and organization. They concluded that researchers should focus more into students' perspective on their difficulties in mastering essay writing, particularly in ESP classes, to assist educators in developing effective teaching method.

Kourichi and Benyelles (2019) explored the specific needs of students in Computer Science Department at Tlemcen University .regarding their English language proficiency, particularly in technical writing. They conducted surveys and interviews with students, English teachers, and computer science experts to

understand the students' needs better. They found that while most students enjoy learning English, they struggle mainly with vocabulary, writing problems, and lack of practice and reading in their area. The current syllabus does not effectively meet the specific needs of these students. They suggest that curriculum should focus on technical English throughout their studies and use engaging teaching method to increase students' motivation.

Accordingly, this study focuses on the challenges of academic writing faced by students in the College of Computer Technology in Azzawia, Libya. It seeks to reveal the issues that Libyan students struggle with English language proficiency, particularly in writing, in an attempt to make it easier to address these challenges and propose the best practical strategies to help students develop stronger academic writing skills.

3- Objectives

In order to fulfill its aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

- a- To analyze IT students written assignments using qualitative content analysis.
- b- To identify frequent errors in grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and technical terminology.
- c- To conduct error analysis to determine common linguistic challenges.
- d- To highlight the impact of these difficulties on students' writing skills.

4- Methodology

4-1 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the writing difficulties of Information Technology (IT) students in an English for specific Purposes (ESP) course. The analysis focuses on students' grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and use of technical terminology. Additionally, an error analysis is conducted to identify common linguistic challenges.

4-2 Participants and Data Collection

The participants in this study are (16) IT students enrolled in (Report writing 2) in the 5th semester at College of Computer Technology/ Azzawia. Total of (16) written assignments were collected for analysis. The assignment requires writing an essay of 250 words on

a topic related to IT technology, using relevant terminology to ensure coherence and clarity.

4-3 Data Analysis

The collected texts were examined using predefined criteria, including:

- Grammar and Syntax: identifying sentence structure errors, verb tense inconsistencies and punctuation mistakes
- Vocabulary and lexical choice: Analyzing the accuracy and appropriateness of IT-related terminology.
- Coherence and Cohesion: Assessing logical flow, paragraph structure, and use of transitions.
- Content and organization: Evaluating clarity in presenting technical concepts.

Patterns and recurring errors were categorized to determine key challenges in students writing. The collected mistakes are arranged from the students into a table and categorized them into grammatical mistakes, punctuation problems, spelling mistakes, vocabulary problems, poor use of transition, and poor organization. The poor organization here is about arranging ideas, writing topics, supporting, and concluding sentences. The findings were used to suggest targeted instructional strategies for improving their writing skills. The study is limited to a specific group of IT students and may not represents all ESP learners.

5- Analysis and discussion

5-1 Analysis of the written papers

Table 1. Analysis of the written papers

Writing problem	Frequency of problems
Grammatical mistakes	83
Vocabulary problems	67
Punctuation problems	55
Spelling mistakes	45
Poor organization	35
Poor use of Transitions	34

Table 1 shows that the highest frequency of mistakes faced by students was grammatical mistakes 83 mistakes found. Followed by 67 mistakes in Vocabulary misuse. Many participants used some Arabic words instead of English terms, and that was due to their

poor lexicon. The third ranked of mistakes frequency was found punctuation 45 mistakes where the most repeated problem was the misuse of capitalization and neglecting punctuation marks. The spelling mistakes are committed 45 times and that in my point of view comes from L1 interference and irregular spelling. Generally, the participants have written essays that suffered from poor organization. They lack the ability to write well-organized text. They have committed 35 different mistakes in when writing topic, supporting and concluding sentences. Some of them wrote the essay in one paragraph in which they mentioned information in long sentences, repeat the same title of the topic sentence followed by ambiguous supporting sentences. The lowest frequency of writing problem was on the use of transitions about 30 mistakes.

5-2 Discussion

Table 1 gives the highest and the lowest frequencies of writing mistakes noted from participants' essays. It shows that IT students face several difficulties in writing that severely impact their performance in the assignment. These deficiencies are detailed in the following points:

5-2-1 Grammatical Problems & Punctuation

A- Punctuation

Punctuation has a significance role in writing; they help to clarify the meaning of sentences, indicate pause and structure the sentences. They even show where emphasis and alter the tone of a sentence. They are essential in communicative writing; using them help in conveying the writers' message properly.

By analyzing the essays, many of the targeted students misused the punctuation -9 participants. Four of them have minimum mistakes in punctuation. They capitalize the first letter and put the full stop at the end of sentences. The rest – completely- ignore the use of commas, exclamation marks. Moreover, they do not use capitalization regularly at the beginning of every new sentence. On my point of view, this is a matter of performance not a matter of competence since all of them have studied the use of punctuation in their early education. Thus, they already have the knowledge of punctuation use in writing. Below are some of the committed mistakes.

- another thing related to misinformation is disinformation. Nor capital Letter neither the full stop at the end.
- first of all what is misinformation No comma after the transition

B- Grammar difficulties

The subjects committed several grammar mistakes. Some examples of these mistakes are as follows:

- **Subject verb agreement.**
 - misinformation influence (s) people
 - most people get the news from Facebook, twitter which lead(s)..
- **Tenses consistency.** Shifting tenses unnecessarily within a document
 - Which people have make increase this problem.
 - ...that was list as the biggest risks
- **Misuse of articles:** confusion over when to use definite and indefinite articles (a-an-the).
- **Prepositions:** Incorrect or omitted prepositions.
- **Sentence Fragments.** Incomplete sentences that lack a main clause.
 - Some of the fake information get spreads very fast because people that
Matches their belivs. !
 - The second مجال is midicine which is sensitive case, when people are
fear and they cant trust the news.
- **Run on sentences**

This happens when two independent clauses are joined improperly without commas instead of coordinating conjunctions. This makes sentences confusing and difficult to read. The common problems associated with run on sentences are lack of punctuation – incorrect use of conjunction- over long sentences.

Most of the participants have run on sentences in their writing. The following is script of run on sentences from student's essay:

- *Misinformation on social media is driven by several factors, the main reason is ease of sharing content without taking ok which people wants increase interaction (likes and other people share) careless if it is trye or false and there is a lot of fakes platforms and boots and this is make to increase speed of wrong information spread.*
- **Passive vs. Active voice:** Overuse of passive voice can make writing less engaging, especially in technical writing. The participant did not overuse passive sentences but some of them committed some mistakes and that in 9 papers. Moreover, I found that many students could not use passive. Actually, there are no passive sentences at all in 7 papers, Some examples of wrong passive sentences from participants' papers
 - *...Public influences with misinformation.*
 - *In 60 news are more viewed by broadcast*
 - *...spreading rumors for fun by people. .*

5-2-2 Vocabulary (vocabulary precision/ wording- spelling)

A- Technical Vocabulary

Writing for English for specific purposes should include precise and meaningful words and avoid vague or incorrect terminology. Strong vocabulary background plays a significant role, it helps in comprehending specialized texts and producing writing communication relevant to the field such as reports, proposals or academic papers. Mastering technical terms is important and crucial for clarity and precision in writing.

Apparently, Students in the targeted assignments encounter several vocabulary challenges when they write. Mostly, they suffer of limited vocabs, as they fail to recall the suitable word in some sentences and instead they try to write a substitution or write them in their mother tongue; Arabic. In my point of view, this happens due to their poor English, lack of exposure to the language used in their field, word formation (prefixes/ suffixes/ building words), collocation in which students should know how to combine words

according to a specific field and lastly technical jargon (the specialized vocabulary which is less common in everyday language).

Here are some examples of the committed mistakes related to vocabulary:

- - The *electronic police* should track people with fake accounts.
- -.. so that people should .. التفريق between fake and correct news.
- - نقص الوعي which people have make increase this problems.
- ...social media *give* any one to share posts about fake news.

B- Spelling

It is an important skill to master especially when writing for English for specific purposes. Correct spelling helps convey the intended message clearly. Besides, it reflects the attention to details and a level of professionalism. Correct spelling also helps in understanding word formation and vocabulary retention. Texts, which are free of spelling mistakes are easier to read and more involving. Incorrect spelled word may give a deviation and effect the meaning. Moreover, Errors in the written texts can distract readers and undermine the authority of the content and eventually impact grades or evaluation.

In this study, many subjects repeated the same spelling mistake and that indicates the lack of practice or due to their poor background of the language.

Here are some of the spelling mistakes found in the subjects' essays:

- Affect/effect
- Econmic/ economic
- lak/ lack
- belive / believe (repeated twice in the same context)

5-2-3 Organization (topic, supporting, concluding sentences – coherence and cohesion: the use of transitions)

A- Topic, supporting and concluding sentences

English writers in various fields usually compose the essay with unique and several paragraphs of four or five sentences each. Choosing an appropriate rhetorical mode that matches the topic processed helps the writer to organize his essay, and that make it easier to comprehend by the reader. Before starting writing students should be aware of the essay mode and format. These essay modes are Narrative, descriptive, expository, persuasive or argumentative. They share similar standard format; Introduction, body and conclusion. The first sentence is the topic (the main idea) then supporting sentences that explains the topic sentence.

Looking at students' essays in this study, I noticed that some of them write according to what information they have or find from their resources. They lack specific order in their writing. As for the topic sentence, only four students out of 16 write correct topic sentences followed by supporting sentences. The rest of the students jump from one thought to another and they are confused between the order of the main ideas and the supporting sentences.

Moreover, many students do not follow standard organization of an essay. They should write that starts with an introduction that states the core of the essay (topic) then explain it in the body. Next, summarize what they have written in a concluding paragraph. Only three students wrote their essays according to this order. These specific students have already studied techniques of writing since they come from different academic background.

B- Cohesion and coherence

According to (George Yule., 2010), "cohesion refers to the linguistic links within a text that help connect sentences and paragraphs," while "Coherence relates to the overall understanding of the text." It means that the ideas and information in the text are logically connected allowing the reader to follow the thought process smoothly." Oshema, A and Hogue, A (2007) illustrate that every good paragraph must have coherence. A coherent paragraph flows smoothly from beginning to end. A reader can follow your ideas easily because one sentence leads naturally to the next one; there are no sudden jumps. (p. 79)

One of the important tools of achieving coherent and cohesive text are transition words. They help in enhancing clarity, improving flow and establishing relationships between ideas and paragraphs. By linking sentences and paragraphs, transition words contribute to the overall unity of the text and that helps in facilitating the flow in more

complex texts such as academic or technical writing. There are many types of transitions. By effectively incorporating these types, writers can improve the readability of their texts, making it easier for readers to follow the argument or narrative.

Types of transition words with examples: -

- Addition: furthermore-, moreover, also, in addition
- Contrast: however, on the other hand, although
- Cause and effect: therefore, consequently, thus, as a result
- Comparison: similarly, likewise, in the same way, on the contrary, differently
- Emphasis: indeed, in fact, certainly, without doubt
- Sequence: first, next, then, finally
- Summary or conclusion: in conclusion, to summarize, overall,

In this study, the subjects rarely used the transition words. Mostly, they find it easier and helpful to list their points or sentences in numbers.

Ex1:- Reasons for misinformation:

- a- Viral nature
- b- Echo chambers
- c- Low Media literacy ...

Some students tried to use transition words to help the stream of thoughts and to connect the sentences but some of them fail to use them properly.

Ex2:- *first of all what is information* There should be a comma after first of all.

Ex3:- *So to solution this* .. no comma after So and it is not acceptable in formal writing..... It is better to use therefore or thus in such cases.

6- Findings of the study

The analysis of the students' written work reveals that grammatical mistakes are the most prevailing issue, with 83 instances, indicating a significant challenge in grammar proficiency. Obviously, students show considerable problems in using vocabulary with 67 instances.

They rely on limited and familiar vocabulary that are rarely related to IT terminology. Besides, some students use their first language (Arabic) instead of English. Punctuation and spelling errors are less frequent but still notable, with 55 to 45 instances, respectively. In addition, there are problems of organization and transitions but they are less common. Organization issues were noted 35 times while transition occurred 34 times. However, Students tend to avoid using transition words making their lack coherence and clarity. In general, these findings show that grammar and vocabulary are the primary challenges that need to be addressed. Punctuation, spelling, organization and transitions are less common but certainly need attention.

7- Conclusion

The present study confirms that students of Faculty of computer technology have difficulties in writings. In their targeted written assignment, they showed significant challenges in writing skills especially to what is related to grammar and vocabulary. Other issues related to coherence and organization surely spotted but less than what is related to grammar and vocabulary due to their ignorance of using essential techniques associated with achieving coherence and organization.

8- Recommendation and further suggestion

The errors as we see are systematic and teachers may overcome the writing deficiencies in many ways. Students and teachers should consider the errors as a gate to understand and solve the accuracy problems in English writing courses.

In addition, the teachers' responsibility is to address the students' needs, adopt, modify and develop a remedial teaching approach that can cure and enhance students' writing skill and decrease their mistakes. Besides, teachers should give brief grammar lessons in order to minimize the mistakes and to help students realize some errors that comes from overgeneralization and wrong analogy. Furthermore, teacher must encourage students to memorize irregular spelling words and terms of their specialization.

Finally, teacher should discuss the topic in English, give some information and provide main vocabulary for writing. Putting in consideration the deficiencies that revealed from this study, I suggest that other researchers focus on early stages of learning. They

should find out the reasons behind the writing problems encountered by ESP students. Consider the following points in further studies

- Reading and writing skills at early stages of learning L2.
- The role of applying writing exercises in classroom to future education.
- The role of pre-session writing courses before university studies.

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