

# Investigating the Problems in Academic Writing of QUEST Undergraduates: A Needs Analysis Perspective

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## Abstract

*The study aims to determine the academic writing problems of undergraduate students at Quaid-e-Awam University (QUEST), Nawabshah, Pakistan, and to survey the students' needs regarding their academic writing competence. A quantitative research design was employed, involving 15 BE and BS departments at the university, with students participating. The sample size used in the study was 150. The data collection was made using a designed questionnaire that was based on the Needs Analysis framework developed by Hutchinson and Waters. The results indicate that academic writing is a major problem for the majority of students. Also, the motivation of students to enhance their academic writing abilities in English is that they have a great interest in doing it correctly, and this is where teaching and learning practices that are effective and efficient play a critical role in the institutions of higher learning.*

**Keywords:** Academic writing, writing problems, writing requirements, need analysis

## INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a critical skill, as it is the primary method through which university students share their knowledge, critical thinking, and research results (Hyland, 2018). Regrettably, such types of skills as grammar, citation, and coherence are especially problematic among non-English-speaking undergraduates. (Bacha, 2002; Lillis & Scott, 2007). Besides, such issues hinder the complete realization, academic participation, and significant dialogue, hindering academic achievement. Hence, facing gaps should be filled to boost academic performance and writing expertise.

According to Pakistani undergraduates, the academic writing remains to be under-discussed. Preparation for university fails to prepare many students for writing at a university level due to rote learning techniques employed in secondary school. (Manan et al., 2017). Moreover, there seems to be no formal instruction at the university level. (Mahmood et al.,

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2020). As a consequence, students are unable to adequately format ideas, apply appropriate academic phrases, and adhere to basic formal writing guidelines, (Pecorari, 2013).

Identifying specific issues in undergraduates' writing requires a needs analysis method. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) noted, a model can be developed that distinguishes between target needs (what students must accomplish in academic writing) and learning needs (the most important obstacles to overcome in the acquisition of the requisite skills). This approach involves formulating a working strategy to evaluate the gap in students' writing skills and design appropriate treatments. Analyzing the needs, as described by Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998), is one of the central components in the discipline of ESP, where language learning is tailored to the professional and scholarly requirements of learners. This principle in teaching academic writing can guide educators to bring strategies that would improve the writing skills of students.

The study employs a needs analysis technique to examine the problem of academic writing among undergraduates at Quaid-e-Awam University (QUEST) in the city of Nawabshah. The current study examines the challenges to writing, as reported by students, and the instructional requirements of the course to identify gaps in the current writing instruction and propose solutions that may help to improve writing pedagogy in universities. The findings of this research will be useful inputs to general debates on academic writing teaching in the institutions of higher learning and will inform the design of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course programs.

### **AIM OF THE STUDY**

This paper will seek to examine the writing issues among undergraduates at Quaid-e-Awam University. Scholars employed the Needs Analysis Model of Hutchinson and Waters (1987). As a methodological process to determine the needs of teaching and learning in the field of ESP, this framework has been utilized to address the enhancement of students' writing. The research essentially examined the desires of students and what they require for their education to identify the areas in which their writing training is failing, and hence, they came up with a strategy to resolve the issues.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

The research is relevant since it examines the writing of Pakistani university students. One thing is clear: many students face specific challenges in writing. g. Coming from a different cultural background, these students require new perspectives, approaches, and

writing guidelines. This is no secret, but one of them, if any. In fact, one of the best ways to combat this hurdle in Pakistan's higher education is by providing the required training and intervention programs. Educators may be able to find new impetus for their EAP programs by taking heed of the experiences of Pakistani university students, and by developing their courses; they will become much more effective.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To investigate the key academic writing problems faced by QUEST undergraduates.
2. To analyze the academic writing needs of QUEST undergraduates.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the key academic writing problems faced by undergraduates at QUEST?
2. How do QUEST undergraduates' target and learning needs influence their academic writing proficiency?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Academic Writing Challenges among Undergraduates**

In point of fact, academic writing is one of the major concepts that is inseparable from success in higher-level education. However, in the case of undergraduates, the point of writing in different aspects of the academic field is their biggest challenge. The research carried out by Hyland in 2018 reveals that the most frequent problems of students in the use of grammar are also related to coherence, organization, vocabulary, and academic tone. Bacha (2002) finds that non-native English speakers have substantial difficulties in syntactic structures as well as in lexical choices. Students must be equipped with critical thinking skills, argumentation skills, and citation knowledge while learning academic writing, since these skills are mostly left underdeveloped due to the application of ineffective teaching methods (Bailey, 2011). Leki and Carson (1997) claim that students' educational backgrounds before university have an impact on their academic writing skills, as many students are not familiar with academic discourse before they get to the university.

Coherence and cohesion are two of the main difficulties that a writer may encounter in academic writing. Coherence is the logical development of arguments, while cohesion relates to the use of the links that help create a unified text (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014). The research reveals that the major difficulties that undergraduates face in writing essays are coherence, inconsistency, which lead to fragmentation of ideas and invisible transitions.

Mistakes in grammar and syntax escalate the problem, and thus, students find it difficult to communicate their thoughts in a clear manner (Ferris, 2009). Incorrect citations and references are a few of the other issues that go hand in hand with academic infringements, as students are most often insufficiently instructed on academic integrity and plagiarism avoidance (Pecorari, 2013).

### **Needs Analysis in Academic Writing Instruction**

Needs analysis plays a very important part in the ESP framework, as it helps with the identification of the learners' issues in writing and their needs in the instruction process (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). The primary aim of needs analysis theory is to investigate the requirements of language learners. According to Juan (2014), needs analysis is considered the activity of recognizing the needs of a single learner or a group of learners who are in need of language and putting more emphasis on those needs. Needs analysis is the process that is used to find out the skills of a learner and the language development needs that are necessary to achieve their goals. It involves finding out the target needs of learners (the skills necessary to be successful in academic activities) as well as their learning needs (the difficulties they face in acquiring those skills). As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) define, needs analysis establishes a basis for curriculum design, which guarantees that writing education is customized to meet the needs of every learner. In the case of undergraduate academic writing, needs analysis provides opportunities for teachers to recognize the gaps in students' writing skills and implement appropriate interventions (Flowerdew, 2013).

### **Needs Analysis Classification (Target and Learning Needs)**

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) proposed two widely recognized categories of needs that have been frequently adopted by Chinese researchers: target needs and learning needs. Target needs refer to what learners require to perform effectively in a target situation, including their necessities, deficiencies, and personal expectations. In contrast, learning needs relate to factors that influence the learning process itself, such as learners' motivation, attitudes, interests, purposes for learning, preferred learning styles, available resources, and time constraints. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) illustrated these two types of needs through a diagram that clearly demonstrates the distinction and relationship between target needs and learning needs.

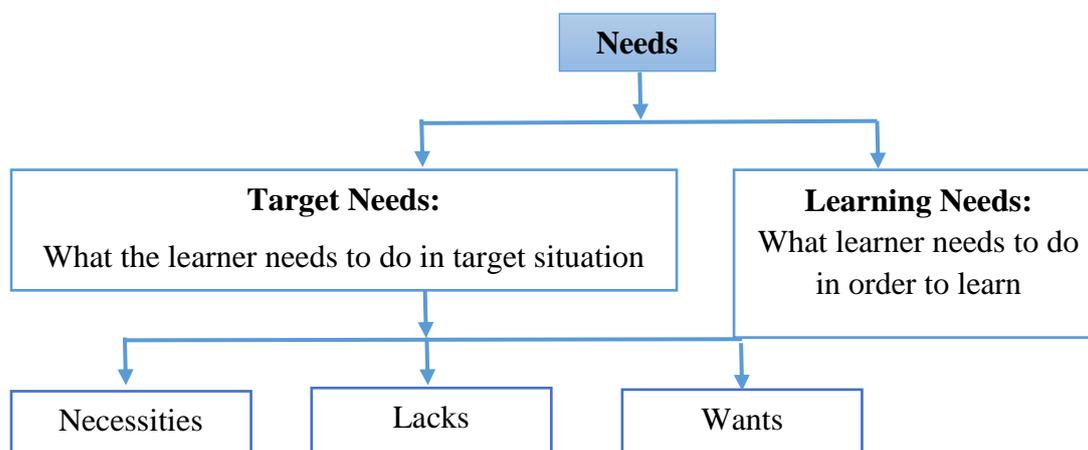


Figure 1: Needs Analysis Classification by Hutchinson and Waters (1987)

Figure 1 shows the needs analysis model developed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), which distinguish between target needs, which can be classified into necessities, lacks, and wants, and learning needs, which handle learning processes and available resources that are necessary to the effective development of academic writing skills. The prior studies indicate that a thorough needs analysis can significantly improve the writing pedagogy as it will address the unique needs of the learners instead of applying generalized writing teaching. Indicatively, Evans and Green (2007) in their research on the topic of university students in Hong Kong indicated that needs-based writing instruction in terms of instruction produced significant gains in coherence, grammatical correctness, and reference skills. In the same manner, Xiao and Chen (2015) revealed that a needs-based course in writing enabled the students in the engineering field of China to solve particular problems in relation to technical writing.

### Previous Studies on Undergraduate Writing Difficulties

The problems that students in higher learning institutions encounter when writing in the pursuit of academic objectives have been researched by many. A study carried out by Hyland (2018) that explored the ESL university students revealed that inadequate vocabulary, scarcity of academic resources, and lack of ability to develop critical thinking skills were some of the factors that caused difficulties in academic writing. Chen (2006) developed the Academic Writing Difficulty Scale, which revealed three main areas of problems in students, which they identified as language, content, and organization. The findings of his research showed that the most serious issues were the language-related problems, followed by the content and organization issues as the second and third ones, respectively.

Similarly, Manan et al. (2017) in Pakistan studied the problem of writing among university students and discovered that the absence of exposure to academic writing, insufficient grammar, and the unhelpful attitude of the faculty were found to be critical barriers. They suggested an academic writing program that would be planned to fill these gaps. Mahmood et al., who came up with the same observations, were also focused on the contribution of writing instruction and faculty guidance as the primary aspects of student academic writing skills development.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study employed quantitative research methodology to discuss and describe the plight of the academic writing challenges for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Engineering (BE) and Bachelor of Science (BS) programs. The research was founded on the model of needs Analysis by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). This model is discovery-based and does not take into account the lack, wants, and needs of English language learners in the context of ESP. The quantitative approach was used to facilitate the collection of statistical data, which may be presented in the form of numbers through a structured and measurable questionnaire.

## **RESEARCH SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS**

Research work was done at Quaid-e-Awam University (QUEST), Nawabshah, Pakistan, where 15 departments were involved. All 15 departments that offer BE and BS degrees at the university were part of the study. The participants of the study were the undergraduate students from different semesters who had taken at least one course/module of academic writing and were currently enrolled in the program. A non-probability convenience sampling method was chosen due to limited accessibility and a large population size. The questionnaire was sent to every student of 15 different departments through an online Google Form; thus, data collection was quite easy and fast.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The primary tool for data collection of this research was a structured questionnaire based on Hutchinson and Waters' Needs Analysis (1987). The instrument was divided into three main sections: Demographic information, Academic writing problems, and Academic writing needs.

1. **Demographic Information:** The first part of the questionnaire was to gather background information about the respondents' gender, age, department, and English language proficiency level.

2. Academic Writing Problems: This segment of the research focused on the range of academic writing problems at the level of vocabulary, organization, coherence, and citation.
3. Academic Writing Needs: This segment of the research focused on the perceived gap of the learners from the point of view of instructional feedback and academic writing.

Each of the items listed under sections two and three was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The subjective perceptions and attitudes captured by the Likert scale were quantifiable for statistical analysis.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Information gathering was accomplished through Google Forms. The department heads and the lecturers were approached to facilitate the distribution of the survey link to the students in their departments. Participants were informed about the aim of the study, and assurances were given regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was free of charge, and prior permission was taken if they intended to complete the questionnaire. The information was exported in raw form from the location of its collection to Microsoft Excel for the initial stage of cleaning, and then the cleaned data were imported into the SPSS software for analysis.

## FINDINGS

### 1. Demographic Information

**Table 1. Gender of the students**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Male	119	79.3	1.2067	0.40627
Female	31	20.7		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 1 shows the gender of students; it shows that the number of male students is more than female students in the sample.

The above data provide the frequency of ages of the students into two groups: 62 students are under the age of 20 years, and 88 students are over the age of 20 years.

**Table 2. Age of the students**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Under20	62	41.3	1.5867	0.49408
Over20	88	58.7		
Total	150	100.0		

**Table 3. Department**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Artificial Intelligence	10	6.7	8.00	4.335
Chemical Engineering	10	6.7		
Chemistry	10	6.7		
Civil Engineering	10	6.7		
Computer Science	10	6.7		
Computer System	10	6.7		
Electrical	10	6.7		
Electronics	10	6.7		
English	10	6.7		
Environmental Engineering	10	6.7		
Information Technology	10	6.7		
Mechanical Engineering	10	6.7		
Physics	10	6.7		
Software Engineering	10	6.7		
Telecommunication Engineering	10	6.7		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 3 presents the equal frequency distribution of students among 15 different departments of the university.

**Table 4. Level of English Proficiency**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Beginner	24	16.0	2.560	0.878
Elementary	33	22.0		

Intermediate	78	52.0
Advanced	15	10.0
Total	150	100.0

Table 4 presents the frequency distribution of self-reported English proficiency levels of the 150 respondents. The majority identified as intermediate (78), followed by Elementary (33), Beginner (24), and Advanced (15). The mean proficiency level is 2.560, with a standard deviation of 0.878, showing that most respondents fall within the lower to mid-range of proficiency.

## 2. Problems of Academic Writing

**Table 5. Do you find it hard to understand and use academic vocabulary in writing?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	15	10.0	2.3933	.89665
Agree	86	57.3		
Neutral	26	17.3		
Disagree	21	14.0		
Strongly Disagree	2	1.3		
Total	150	100.0		

As illustrated in Table 5, the participants have significantly mixed perceptions about the difficulty of concurrently comprehending and using academic vocabulary in writing. Among the 150 respondents, 15 strongly agree, and 86 agree with the findings that it is challenging, which suggests that a notable proportion struggle with some components of academic vocabulary. 26 respondents chose to maintain neutrality, while 21 disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed, which indicates that a relatively limited number of participants feel proficient in this construct. In addition, it is important to consider the context of the finding where the mean score of 2.3933 (SD = 0.89665) indicates some level of agreement towards it being a point of concern, which indeed confirms the presence of a gap. This becomes a consistent finding that learners struggle with academic vocabulary in learning contexts.

**Table 6. Do you struggle to express yourself effectively in academic assignments?**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. Deviation</b>
Strongly Agree	22	14.7	2.2867	.86960
Agree	80	53.3		
Neutral	33	22.0		
Disagree	13	8.7		
Strongly Disagree	2	1.3		
Total	150	100.0		

The above data highlights respondents' perceptions about their ability to express themselves effectively in academic assignments. Among the total 150 respondents, 22 strongly agree and 80 simply agree that they struggle with this notion. However, 33 were neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the problem of self-expression. A small proportion of 13 respondents disagree with this notion, and only 2 strongly disagree. This table of data shows the diversity of opinions and experiences of individuals regarding their struggles and challenges in self-expression in academic assignments.

**Table 7. Do you find it difficult to organize complex ideas clearly in your writing?**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. Deviation</b>
Strongly Agree	32	21.3	2.1067	.81221
Agree	80	53.3		
Neutral	28	18.7		
Disagree	10	6.7		
Total	150	100.0		

This data shows the ideas of individuals regarding their challenges to organizing complex ideas or information in their writings. Among the total, 32 strongly agree that they find it difficult, while 80 agree with this idea. In contrast, 10 disagree with the idea of facing challenges, and 0 respondents strongly disagree. However, 28 respondents remain neutral with this notion. This distribution of respondents shows the strong agreement of **130** individuals regarding the challenges they face while organizing complex ideas in their academic writing clearly.

**Table 8. Do you encounter challenges when writing research papers or academic reports?**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. Deviation</b>
Strongly Agree	32	21.3	2.1333	.86441
Agree	78	52.0		
Neutral	31	20.7		
Disagree	6	4.0		
Strongly Disagree	3	2.0		
Total	150	100.0		

The data reveal those respondents' perceptions concerning the difficulties they face in writing a research paper or an academic report. From the total number of participants, 32 strongly agree that they face such challenges, while 78 simply agree with the statement. Furthermore, 31 take a neutral stance, not taking sides, agreeing or disagreeing with these difficulties. In contrast, only 6 respondents disagree, and 3 respondents strongly disagree with the problems. Accordingly, this table shows that the majority of the surveyed people have experienced writing research papers and academic reports as challenging.

**Table 9. Do you have problems structuring essays and assignments logically?**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. Deviation</b>
Strongly Agree	27	18.0	2.3400	.88863
Agree	60	40.0		
Neutral	48	32.0		
Disagree	15	10.0		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 9 shows the issues that the respondents perceive when logically structuring academic essays and assignments. Out of all the respondents, 27 people strongly agree that they have difficulties in logically structuring essays and assignments, while 60 respondents just agree. Moreover, 48 respondents are neutral in this case as they do not confirm or deny that they have problems in the logical structuring of academic essays and assignments. However, a small number of 15 respondents disconfirm the statement, and there are 131 respondents who strongly disagree with the idea of facing problems.

**Table 10. Do you find it difficult to write coherent paragraphs and link your ideas?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	30	20.0	2.3133	.97717
Agree	68	45.3		
Neutral	27	18.0		
Disagree	25	16.7		
Total	150	100.0		

The data unveil the participants' perceptions of writing coherent paragraphs as their main source of trouble. 30 respondents out of those surveyed strongly agreed with the statement about the difficulties in writing coherent paragraphs and linking ideas, while 68 respondents just agreed with the statement. Moreover, 27 respondents have a neutral position and do not confirm nor reject the statement of the difficulties. Nevertheless, 25 respondents simply disagreed with the statement about the difficulties in writing paragraphs coherently, and 0 respondents strongly disagreed. Such a distribution shows the variety of responses and the different experiences of the surveyed population concerning the issue of writing paragraphs coherently and linking ideas in the writing.

**Table 11. Do you face challenges in writing under time pressure during exams?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	46	30.7	2.2133	1.12677
Agree	55	36.7		
Neutral	27	18.0		
Disagree	15	10.0		
Strongly Disagree	7	4.7		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 11 represents the responses of the respondents to the question as to whether they were pressed to write when time was limited. Among the participants, 46 out of several (n= 55) respondents strongly agree with the statement that they have difficulties with writing

under pressure, such as when taking exams. The neutral responses are 27, which means that they are uncertain or had mixed experiences. Conversely, 15 respondents do not agree with this question; a few of them did not experience time pressure, and only 7 respondents strongly disagree. The numbers point to the fact that the majority of the participants note that time pressure in exams is a big problem, and more than two-thirds of the respondents attest to the presence of the problem.

**Table 12. Do you find it hard to maintain an academic tone and style in your writing?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	21	14.0	2.1867	.72710
Agree	87	58.0		
Neutral	35	23.3		
Disagree	7	4.7		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 12 indicates the responses of the respondents to the question among 150 respondents, 21 students strongly agree, and 87 agree that they find it hard to be academic in their tone/style of writing. Only 35 respondents stayed in the middle ground and only 7 strongly disagreed which indicated that hardly any of the respondents were confident in this aspect and zero were strongly against it. This distribution shows that keeping academic tone and style is a major problem to most of the participants.

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**Table 13. Do you encounter difficulties developing clear and focused thesis statements?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	23	15.3	2.1933	.74812
Agree	82	54.7		
Neutral	38	25.3		
Disagree	7	4.7		
Total	150	100.0		

The above data show how the participants react to facing problems with formulating clear and focused thesis statements. Among the 150 respondents, 23 of them strongly affirm that they encounter problems in formulating thesis statements and 82 of them just affirm the query. But there are 38 neutral ones, which indicate hesitation or sometimes the lack of ease.

The number of respondents who disagree is only 7 and those who strongly disagree 0. This information indicates that concise and focused thesis statements are a weakness that many respondents surveyed have.

**Table 14. Do you feel anxious or less confident when writing academic papers?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	17	11.3	2.4067	.90559
Agree	76	50.7		
Neutral	41	27.3		
Disagree	11	7.3		
Strongly Disagree	5	3.3		
Total	150	100.0		

The data demonstrate the perceptions of the respondents on whether they are nervous or less confident with writing an academic paper. Out of 150 respondents, 17 strongly agree with the idea, and 76 just agree that they feel anxious or lowly confident when writing academically. Also, there are 41 respondents who are neutral. There is only 11 who disagreed with the question and 5 who strongly disagreed and feel confident with writing academic papers. The data snapshots indicate that among the population surveyed the common barrier to academic writing is anxiousness and low confidence.

### 3. Learners' needs in terms of academic writing skills

**Table 15. Do you need to improve your academic vocabulary for more effective writing?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	54	36.0	1.7267	.61192
Agree	83	55.3		
Neutral	13	8.7		
Total	150	100.0		

The information shows whether students believe that they should enhance their writing vocabulary. Among 150 respondents, 54 strongly agree, and 83 simply agree, which indicates definite awareness of improvement in academic vocabulary by means of more effective writing. Moreover, 13 respondents are neutral, and the respondents who disagreed with the source are zero. This data distribution shows that there is a lot of overall congruency

with the idea, and that there is a vital necessity of the academic vocabulary development to enhance academic writing.

**Table 16. Do you need more practice in organizing ideas and structuring academic texts?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	50	33.3	1.8000	.67556
Agree	82	54.7		
Neutral	16	10.7		
Disagree	2	1.3		
Total	150	100.0		

The findings indicate how the respondents feel about the necessity of having more practice in the systematizing of ideas and structuring of academic texts. Within the participants surveyed, a considerable number agreed with the need, 50 of the respondents strongly agreed with the need, and 82 respondents agreed. Nonetheless, 16 respondents were neutral. Conversely, 2 do not agree and none strongly disagree with the need. Such distribution highlights one of the main anxious points in academic writing, which is the importance of implementing structured writing practice.

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**Table 17. Do you need to develop skills in writing research papers and formal reports?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	64	42.7	1.6667	.64159
Agree	72	48.0		
Neutral	14	9.3		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 17 underscores the fact that the respondents felt that they need to acquire skills on how to write research papers and formal reports. A large part, 64 out of the 100 respondents strongly agree that they require improvement and 72 people concur with this idea. Moreover, 14 of the respondents are neutral, neither stating the affirmation nor the denial of the improvement. On the contrary, none of the respondents oppose the necessity of

improvement. The data indicates a high consensus of the respondents with the development of the skills in academic writing.

**Table 18. Do you need to enhance your paragraph development and coherence in writing?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	57	38.0	1.7667	.70869
Agree	73	48.7		
Neutral	18	12.0		
Disagree	2	1.3		
Total	150	100.0		

The table above represents the perceived need of the respondents to improve the development of paragraphs and coherence in writing. Out of the respondents of 150, 57 of the respondents strongly agree that the enhancement should be done and 73 of the respondents merely agree with the question. Moreover, 18 are also indifferent, with uncertain or ambivalent experiences. Nevertheless, there are only 2 who are against 0 strongly dislike the notion that they need to improve their paragraph development and coherence of their writing. As this table shows, academic paragraphs writing cohesively is a skill that learners should intensely improve.

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**Table 19. Do you need training on using correct academic writing conventions (citation, formatting)?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	55	36.7	1.8467	.79205
Agree	68	45.3		
Neutral	22	14.7		
Disagree	5	3.3		
Total	150	100.0		

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Table 19 shows that the respondents perceived a need to be trained on the use of correct academic writing conventions like formatting and citation. Out of 150 respondents, 55 of them strongly agree that they require training or improvement and 68 of them merely agree. Besides, 22 are neutral, with ambivalent experiences. Conversely, 2 do not agree whereas, 0 strongly agree that training is necessary on how to use proper academic writing conventions.

**Table 20. Do you need more support for writing under exam conditions (timed essays)?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	50	33.3	1.8867	.79880
Agree	74	49.3		
Neutral	19	12.7		
Disagree	7	4.7		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 20 represents the self-reported requirements of the respondents to receive more support in case of writing during the examinations. Among 150 respondents, 50 of them strongly agree that they should be provided with more support, and 74 agree with the idea. A total of 19 respondents are in the middle, although only 7 of them do not support the notion that more should be done in terms of writing under exam conditions, and no one is strongly opposed to it. This distribution indicates that the majority of respondents require better and more assistance in writing under exams.

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**Table 21. Do you wish to improve your critical thinking and argumentation in writing?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation	
Strongly Agree	48	32.0	1.9267	.82817	137
Agree	71	47.3			
Neutral	28	18.7			
Strongly Disagree	3	2.0			
Total	150	100.0			

The data indicate the subjective desire of the respondents to enhance their critical thinking and argumentation in a writing form. Out of the respondents, 48 highly agree that they want to be better at critical thinking and argumentation when writing academic papers, and 71 people concur with the idea. Nonetheless, 28 respondents are under the fence as they neither reject the idea nor confirm it. On the contrary, the 3 respondents that do not agree with the idea of improvement are few, and there is no strong disagreement.

**Table 22. Do you need more practice opportunities for academic writing tasks?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	41	27.3	1.9667	.76340
Agree	78	52.0		
Neutral	26	17.3		
Disagree	5	3.3		
Total	150	100.0		

The data above is relevant in showing that the respondents felt that they needed to get more experience in writing academic assignments. The large percentage of 41 respondents strongly agrees that they require more practice, but 78 respondents like the notion. Further 26 respondents were neutral meaning that they were neither sure nor had divided views. Conversely, several respondents 5 do not agree with the fact that they do not require additional academic writing tasks practice, with no respondent strongly disagreeing.

**Table 23. Do you want to gain greater confidence in your academic writing skills?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	56	37.3	1.7533	.66491
Agree	75	50.0		
Neutral	19	12.7		
Total	150	100.0		

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Table 23 highlights respondents' self-perceived need to gain higher confidence in their academic writing skills. Among 150 participants, 56 strongly agree that they want to gain greater confidence, while 75 simply agree with the idea. However, 19 were remaining neutral, neither confirming nor denying the notion. Meanwhile, no respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the idea of gaining greater confidence in academic writing skills. This data highlights the significance of respondents' agreement regarding their need to gain higher confidence in academic writing.

**Table 24. Do you need help adjusting your writing style for different academic audiences?**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Strongly Agree	37	24.7	1.9533	.68871
Agree	85	56.7		
Neutral	26	17.3		
Disagree	2	1.3		
Total	150	100.0		

Table 24 shows the answers of respondent' need to get help from different academic audiences for adjusting their writing style. From the 150 respondents, 37 strongly agree with the statement, while 85 simply agree. Additionally, 26 remain neutral, showing mixed opinions. Whereas just 2 respondents disagree with the inquiry, and no one strongly disagrees. This data of respondents' perception indicates the strong overall agreement of the need for help from various academic audiences for improving academic writing style.

## DISCUSSION

The study aims to investigate the problems in acad K. Nimra & A. Tameer undergraduate students of Quaid-e-Awam University (QUEST), INAWAUSHAH, PAKISTAN, and explore their needs in terms of academic writing skills. The study consists of 150 students, comprising 79.3% male students and 20.7% female students. A major portion of students was over the age of 20 (58.7%), and the data were collected from 15 BE and BS department 139 across the university.

### Challenges Faced in Academic Writing

Almost all students indicate that they have difficulties when they use and understand academic vocabulary in their writing, expressing their ideas properly in academic tasks, and structuring complicated ideas in their writing. The mentioned problems have a great impact on students' academic writing performance. The problem of writing in academic reports, logically structuring essays, assignments, coherent paragraphs, and writing under time constraints. Further points to the necessity of a targeted academic writing support program that will help students to strengthen their academic writing skills. The challenges in clarifying

and shortening statements, becoming more anxious and less confident when writing academic papers, which are mentioned in the report, imply that students might need some extra help and guidance in these academic writing situations.

### **Identified Needs and Desired Support**

Besides, the students strongly expressed their desire to enhance their academic vocabulary, have more practice in organizing ideas and information in academic tasks, and be able to write formal reports in English. Such needs revealed the students' recognition of the necessity of having good academic writing skills and the growth of their personalities. Nevertheless, the necessity to be trained in the proper use of writing in academic conventions like formatting and citation, receiving help for writing under exam conditions, and improving critical thinking and argumentation skills are some of the signs that the students require more targeted chances and encourage to acquire these skills. Moreover, students want more chances to do academic writing tasks to gain more confidence in writing and to be able to change their writing style for different academic audiences. In relation to these needs, students want to improve their general academic writing skills, are aware of the significance of these skills in different academic contexts, and are willing to invest their time and effort in this area to enhance their skills. The students revealed that they needed to work on their critical thinking skills and be able to logically organize ideas and i K. Nimra & A. Tameer thus pointing to the importance that the students put on their personal and professional communication, and as well as, acknowledging their willingness to develop these skills in the targeted areas.

### **Alignment with Previous Research**

The results of this study concur with the previous work in the same field, which 140 identified nearly the same challenges in academic writing of university students. For example, a single case study on ESL university students revealed that academic writing difficulties could be traced to limited vocabulary, non-exposure to academic materials, and weak critical thinking skills (Hyland, 2008). Besides, research in different educational settings has been consistent in emphasizing that the development of writing skills is at the heart of both academic and professional success. In addition to that, these researchers also acknowledge the necessity of providing ample support and guidance in the areas referred to (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Mahmood et al., 2020; Flowerdew, 2013).

The results of this study are very important for foreign language (FL) teaching and learning as they show the ways teachers can employ to upgrade their students' academic writing skills. While teachers cooperate with students in the development of writing skills, they should be responsible for committing to the design of more efficient language learning programs and strategies that can tackle each learner's individual needs and problems. Besides, the creation of a positive and supportive learning atmosphere is just as necessary, as it encourages students to implement their English language skills.

## CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the difficulties that university students encounter due to a lack of academic writing skills and the importance of this writing skill required to manage their courses at the BE, BS, and Technology levels at Quaid-e-Awam University (QUEST), Nawabshah, Pakistan. Most students had difficulties with the use of academic vocabulary, the utility of language for different contexts, and the use of appropriate language for the expression of a particular idea, the expression of a complicated idea, and the ability to maintain a state of balance and coherence in their writing. The results of the study also reveal the importance of the teaching and learning of language at the university level, which was the students' wish to improve their skills with academic texts. Furthermore, the results of this study support the need for a positive and productive classroom environment for students to practice their academic writing skills and improve their use of English.

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