

# EXAMINING LECTURERS' INSIGHTS: RESOLVING CHALLENGES AND IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG KOSOVO STUDENTS

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## Abstract

This study examines the perspectives of 40 lecturers from public and private universities in Kosovo on the challenges students face in developing academic writing skills and strategies for improvement. Using a structured questionnaire, lecturers identify common obstacles: insufficient foundational skills, lack of critical thinking, issues with clarity and cohesion, difficulties balancing personal ideas with sources, problems adhering to standards, and grammar and vocabulary misuse. The research highlights effective strategies to address these issues, including peer review, individualized feedback, writing workshops, critical thinking development, a supportive classroom environment, clear objectives for assignments, regular writing tasks, and offering choice in topic selection. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive institutional support and active student engagement to enhance writing proficiency. The study offers practical recommendations to improve writing instruction, contributing to higher education quality in Kosovo.

*Keywords: academic writing, students' obstacles, lecturers' techniques, higher education.*

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### Introduction

Academic writing is crucial for university success, requiring students to present ideas coherently, argue persuasively, and understand complex concepts. Its proficiency enables students to contribute to scholarly discourse, synthesize information from diverse sources, and express their viewpoints with clarity. It also highlights their analytical and critical thinking abilities, which are essential for both academic and professional success. Therefore, fostering strong academic writing skills is integral to the educational experience, equipping students with the tools they need to excel in their studies and future careers.

Various scholars concur on the definition of academic writing. Oshima and Hogue (2007), argue that academic writing focuses on the type of second language learners used in university settings as well as high schools and colleges. They assert further that academic writing is more challenging than other types of writing where proper organization and grammar are required, hence, it needs a lot of study and practice to develop learners' writing skills. Bowker (2007) on the other hand, refers to academic writing as a special genre of writing prevalent in scholarly contexts, such as universities, research institutions, and academic publications and it is characterized by a formal tone, precise language, and adherence to specific standards and conventions.

In Kosovo, where English is taught as a second language and is a mandatory part of university curricula, students often face significant challenges in mastering academic writing. These difficulties cover a wide range of language acquisition, such as grammar, critical thinking, coherence, and the ability to convey ideas effectively. Lecturers, with their extensive experience and daily interactions with students, possess invaluable insight into these difficulties and solutions that can overcome or mitigate them. They are typically at the forefront of identifying specific challenges that students encounter and are in charge of coming up with and putting into practice instructional solutions to deal with these problems. Addressing such issues and challenges requires a compre-

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hensive and nuanced understanding of students' struggles and tactics that can help them succeed.

Thus, this study intends to:

- Identify obstacles students face in achieving academic writing proficiency as perceived by lecturers
- Explore the strategies lecturers believe are most effective in overcoming these challenges and improving students' writing skills
- Provide/offer practical recommendations for educators/lecturers to enhance academic writing instruction and support in Kosovo

## Literature Review

### *Definition and Importance of Academic Writing*

Academic writing is a multifaceted activity essential to university teaching and learning. It involves both physical and mental processes: the physical act of writing and the cognitive effort of organizing thoughts and expressing them clearly (Nunan, 2023). The importance of academic writing has led to movements like Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which aim to enhance students' writing and learning within specific fields (Marinkovich et al., 2016; Russel et al., 2009). These movements highlight the central role of writing in developing critical thinking and communication skills, which are crucial for academic success.

### *Common Challenges in Academic Writing Across Countries*

Despite its importance, students worldwide face numerous challenges in academic writing, including grammar, coherence, and adherence to academic conventions. Research by Al-Badi (2015) and Belkhir & Benyelles (2017) identifies language use, cohesion, coherence, and referencing as major difficulties due to insufficient knowledge of writing conventions. In non-native contexts, challenges are compounded by the influence of students' first languages, making coherence and grammatical accuracy

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harder to achieve (Ariyanti, 2016; Imani & Habibi, 2012). Furthermore, the transition from secondary to higher education often worsen these difficulties, highlighting the need for targeted support to bridge these gaps (Baker, 2017).

### ***Recommendations for Addressing Academic Writing Challenges***

Researchers recommend a comprehensive approach that includes targeted instruction, cognitive skill development, and cultural awareness to address these challenges. Effective strategies involve integrating writing skills into the curriculum through workshops, peer reviews, and individualized feedback to enhance understanding and practice (Choemue & Bram, 2021; Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Addressing linguistic and cultural barriers through explicit instruction on academic conventions and promoting a deeper understanding of the writing process can help mitigate the impact of first-language interference and plagiarism (Subasman, 2020). By adopting these strategies, educators can better support students in developing the skills necessary for academic writing success.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to understand the challenges faced by students in academic writing. The participants were 40 university professors from both public and private universities in Kosovo, selected for their expertise in teaching English writing courses. Data were collected using an online questionnaire designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information. Quantitative data provided measurable insights, while qualitative responses offered detailed explanations and perspectives. The questionnaire was divided into three sections:

Section 1: Demographic Information

Section 2: Challenges Faced by Students

Section 3: Strategies and Solutions

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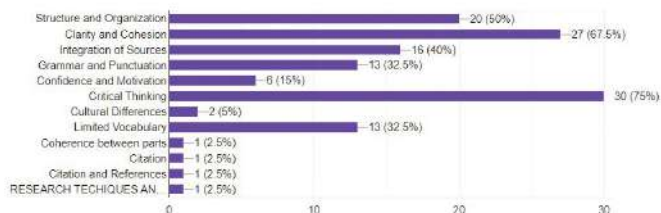
## Findings and Discussion

The researcher was firstly interested to know the lecturers' perspectives about the most frequent challenges students face when writing an academic essay. According to the data collected, the most frequently cited challenge identified by over 30% of professors was the lack of critical thinking skills. Professors noted that students often struggle to develop and articulate their ideas logically and analytically. Following critical thinking, issues related to clarity and cohesion were also highlighted as significant obstacles. Many professors observed that students have difficulty linking sentences and paragraphs effectively, which undermines the overall coherence of their essays. Additionally, challenges with structure and organization were reported, with students often failing to present their arguments in a well-structured and orderly fashion (fig.1).

**Section 2: Challenges Faced by Students** In your experience, what are the most common challenges that students encounter when writing academic essays in English?

(You can choose more than one answer)

40 responses

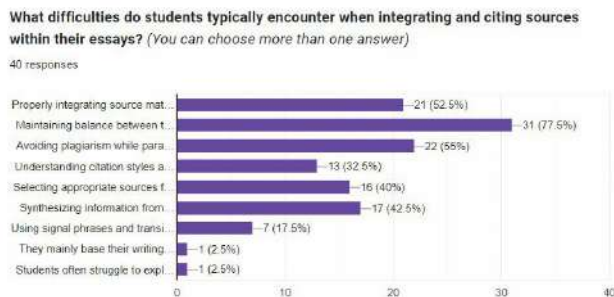


**Figure 1.** Students' challenges in writing academic essays in English

The next question aimed to uncover students' difficulties when integrating sources within their essays. The majority of professors responded that maintaining a balance between their own ideas and the sources was the most common difficulty. Following this, avoiding plagiarism while paraphrasing or summarizing was frequently mentioned. Professors also highlighted challenges in properly integrating source material into students' own writing and synthesizing information from multiple sources. Additionally, some professors noted that students

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often struggle to explain how the sources support their claims. Related to this, it was observed that students frequently do not make clear claims in their topic sentences that further prove their thesis statement. Meanwhile, fewer professors agreed that selecting appropriate sources to integrate and understanding citation styles and formatting were less common obstacles (fig 2).

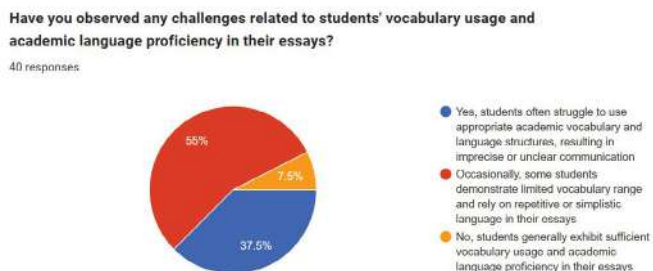


**Figure 2.** Difficulties in integrating and citing sources

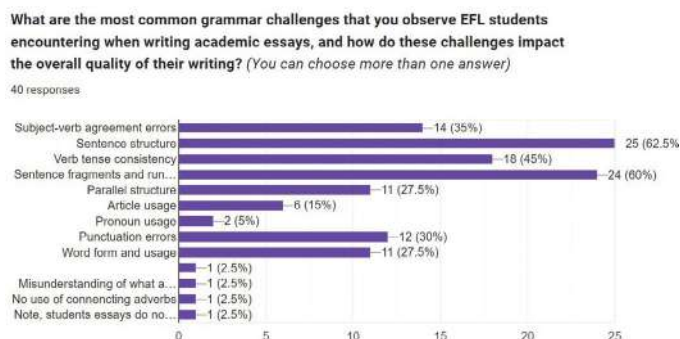
Issues related to grammar usage, vocabulary usage, and academic language proficiency skills were also areas that the study intended to reveal, as shown in Figure 3 below.

The data shows that in terms of grammar, the most common challenges are related to sentence structure, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement, and verb tense consistency. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of professors identified obstacles such as article usage, pronoun usage, and punctuation errors. Concerning vocabulary usage, 55% of respondents indicated that students demonstrate a limited vocabulary range and rely on repetitive and simplistic language in their essays.

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**Figure 3.** Challenges in vocabulary usage and academic language proficiency

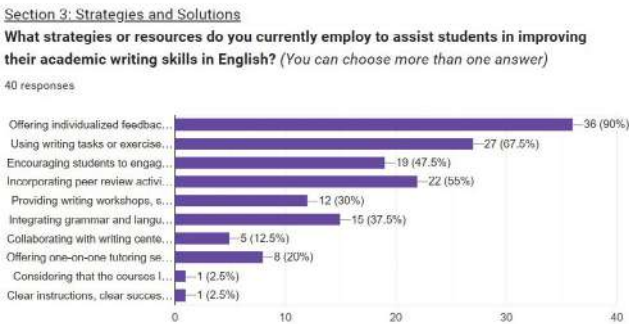


**Figure 4.** Grammar challenges in academic essays

Section 3 of the questionnaire aimed to uncover the strategies and solutions that lecturers currently employ to help students improve their academic writing skills in English. When asked, “What strategies or resources do you currently employ to assist students in improving their academic writing skills in English?”, the majority of professors emphasized the importance of offering individualized feedback on students’ written assignments, as this allows them to highlight both strengths and areas for improvement. Additionally, many professors recommended using writing tasks and exercises to promote regular practice and skill development. Incorporating peer review activities, where students provide feedback to each other, was also identified as an effective strategy. Furthermore, encouraging students to engage in reflective writing exercises was highlighted as a valuable approach, helping students assess their own progress and identify areas for

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growth. These strategies were seen as essential tools in fostering students’ writing abilities and critical thinking skills (fig 5).



**Figure 5.** Strategies provided by lecturers to improve students’ academic writing skills

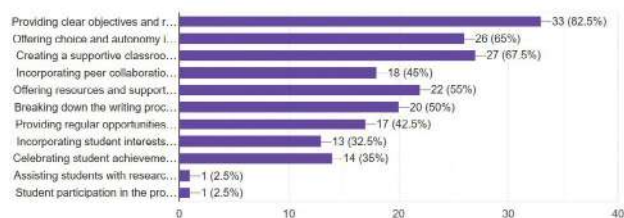
Following this question, lecturers were also allowed to provide open-ended responses, sharing their insights on additional support mechanisms to address the challenges students face in academic writing. These qualitative responses were summarized by identifying recurring themes and categorizing the different types of support suggested by lecturers. This thematic analysis helped in understanding the range and diversity of opinions and ideas expressed. For instance, responses varied widely, with suggestions including organizing regular writing workshops tailored to Kosovo students’ needs, and offering language support programs, and courses to improve English language proficiency. To better understand the frequency of these suggestions, responses were quantified by counting how many lecturers mentioned each type of support. This quantification allowed to gauge the relative emphasis or priority placed on each suggestion by the lecturers. Some emphasized the need for writing instruction to begin much earlier, ideally from primary school, to build a stronger foundation. Additionally, many highlighted the importance of encouraging students to read more as a way to enhance their writing skills and overall language proficiency.



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How do you motivate/encourage students to engage actively in the writing process and overcome any reluctance or apprehension they may have towards writing essays assignments? (You can choose more than one answer)

40 responses



**Figure 6.** Approaches to inspire student participation in the writing process and address any hesitation or resistance to writing essays.

Another question posed to the lecturers was, “How do you motivate/encourage students to engage actively in the writing process and overcome any reluctance or apprehension they may have towards writing essay assignments?” The responses varied, with 33% of lecturers emphasizing the importance of providing clear objectives and demonstrating the relevance of writing assignments to motivate students. Additionally, many lecturers found that offering students choice and autonomy in topic selection fosters a greater sense of ownership and interest in the writing process. Creating a supportive classroom environment was also highlighted as crucial for encouraging active participation. Other strategies included offering resources and support to help students overcome challenges and breaking down the writing process into manageable steps to reduce overwhelm and build confidence. These approaches collectively aim to reduce students’ apprehension and foster a more positive and engaged attitude towards academic writing, as depicted in Figure 6 above.

### Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight several key challenges and effective strategies related to academic writing among university students in Kosovo. Critical thinking emerged as the most significant obstacle, with many students struggling to develop and articulate complex ideas in their essays. Issues of clarity, cohesion, and

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structure were also prevalent, emphasizing the need for targeted support in these areas. Professors identified a range of strategies to help students improve, including providing individualized feedback, promoting regular writing practice, and incorporating peer review activities. Additionally, the importance of early intervention and fostering a reading culture was suggested as essential for building stronger writing foundations. Furthermore, lecturers emphasized the need for clear objectives and relevance in writing assignments to motivate students, alongside offering autonomy in topic selection and creating a supportive classroom environment. The study underscores the necessity of comprehensive support mechanisms, including regular writing workshops, language proficiency courses, and early writing education, to effectively address the challenges students face in academic writing. These insights provide valuable guidance for educators seeking to enhance their students' writing skills and critical thinking abilities, ultimately contributing to their academic success.

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