

## Research Article

# Kurdish EFL Undergraduates' Academic Writing: Discussing the Main Writing Difficulties and Potential Solutions

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received May 04, 2024 Revised Jun 26, 2024 Accepted Jun 29, 2024	English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers in the Kurdistan Region - Iraq (KRI) often report poor academic essay quality among Kurdish EFL undergraduates. The purpose of this study was therefore to determine the challenges and difficulties Kurdish English-majoring undergraduates encounter in their academic writing. Through writing 60 essays by the undergraduates in three public universities in KRI and interviewing 12 lecturers, we explored writing difficulties and potential suggestions to enhance undergraduates' writing skills. We found that students made numerous grammatical, spelling, and capitalization errors. Additionally, many of the students also struggled to write proper introduction and conclusion paragraphs in their essays. The outcomes of this article suggest that students need to read more frequently and organize their ideas for effective writing. Suggesting university programmes, various ways of teaching by lecturers in EFL classes, and writing modules were the most repetitive recommendations by the interviewees meant to enhance students' academic writing skills. Practical implications, Limitations, further research considerations, and implications are discussed in the article.
<b>Keywords</b> Kurdistan Region – Iraq Writing difficulties Academic writing Kurdish EFL learners EFL lecturers	



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## 1. Introduction

Academic writing is considered one of the most challenging skills for many EFL students to master across the globe. Academic writing differs from other forms of writing as it is an intellectual product and a cognitive activity (Al Fadda, 2012). It encompasses various methods and techniques taught in universities, starting from organizing sentences and generating ideas to critical thinking, establishing vocabulary, and following grammatical rules (Abdulkareem, 2013). Hence, academic writing is defined by many scholars based on their individual perspectives. For instance, Tardy (2005) defined it as a “transformation of knowledge that involves convincing readers of the value, significance, and credibility of one’s work.” Academic writing is also described as a form of assessment that requires learners to display understanding and competence of specific skills such as making inferences, analysis, and production (Irvin, 2010). Writing is considered one of the most essential skills in the English language. It is arguably the most important skill

to master in academic settings. Undergraduates use their academic writing skills to secure job opportunities and advance their careers (Alfaqiri, 2018; Hyland, 2013).

Al Mubarak (2017) explains that academic writing skills are primarily concerned with the development of students' linguistic competency, in which many language learners find it challenging to master, and probably the most challenging skill to acquire, especially by EFL students. Students in higher education institutions often face difficulties in academic writing. This makes them unable to meet the institutions' writing literacy expectations, as highlighted by Hama (2021). Xiao and Chen (2015) discovered that a significant challenge in academic writing lies in the lack of depth and profundity in content, particularly when students feel incompetent when they perform writing tasks (Eryilmaz & Yesilyurt, 2022). The students were incapable of producing new ideas and expressing their thoughts in writing as stated in Javid and Umer's (2014) study, concluding that students have issues of coming up with ideas and organizing them. Although this challenge is believed to be universal, many Kurdish EFL undergraduates suffer from such challenges in one way or another. Hama (2021) believed that Kurdish EFL university students often have problems when they intend to write various pieces of writing at different levels. Arguably, academic writing is one of the critical courses that the students take for four years, and the overall goal of the course is for the students to acquire the necessary writing skills and observe the different kinds of writings and genres (Ariyanti, 2016). However, many students even after taking the course for four years still find the subject a challenging task.

Previous findings have generally suggested that students make mistakes in academic writing on a regular basis, which often results in making their writings weak. As such, vocabulary usage, improper grammar, spelling errors, and punctuation issues are found to be among the most common errors made by EFL learners (Al Fadda, 2012; Alfaqiri, 2018; Al-Khairiy, 2013; Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010; Arindra & Ardi, 2020). Also, academic writing even for most native speakers is a challenge, students may encounter difficulties in terms of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and at a more advanced level, in developing coherent arguments while writing reports and essays (Al Fadda, 2012; Alfaki, 2015). Mwangi (2017) revealed that students did complications relating to terminology usage, their spelling, and the development of arguments in their academic writing papers. They have discovered that 1018 spelling errors were made by the degree students, and 867 errors were made by the diploma students. In addition to spelling and grammar errors, Brown (2008) argues that undergraduates' lack of knowledge of the assigned essay topics had a significant negative impact on their ability to write. Another study carried out in Punjab showed that 60 college students made errors mostly in punctuation, and it is due to ignorance and carelessness of their writing (Khan & Khan, 2016). For example, errors are made by the students in the misuse of comma, colon, and semicolon. Similarly, Shweba and Mujiyanto (2017) stated that punctuation and capitalization are the most frequent problems students stumble with in writing academic essays. Ahmed (2010) focused on cohesiveness and

coherence of Egyptian learners in essay writing, and he contended that students had difficulties in composing thesis statements, subject sentences and sequencing ideas. He also demonstrated that students lack sufficient information about the topics due to their disinterest in reading. Moreover, Uba and Souidi (2020) claim that it was difficult for the EFL students to compose proper introductory and concluding paragraphs. Likewise, Ahmad (2010) claims that students considered it challenging to construct an appropriate essay introduction.

Numerous solutions to the issues with academic writing have been covered in previous investigations, for example, Sulistyaningrum and Avianka (2021) suggest that students should follow some steps before writing, such as thinking and planning. According to Peel's (2014) perception, instructors might use a range of strategies to effectively teach learners how to compose their essays academically. This is similar to Duong's (2018) views who claims that for students to become better writers and speakers, universities have to offer specific programs. Additionally, one of the most effective techniques that improved academic writing is practice on writing itself (Hu, 2022). Also, Hyland (2013) highlighted that as a form of thinking especially in tertiary literacy, students' ability in sustaining arguments and synthesizing ideas to write in English language is crucial for academic writing success. Although students write daily, they need to be familiar with the discourse of academia (Alabere & Shapii, 2019). Also, Ien et al. (2017) highlighted that the teaching methods and the types of writing activities in the classroom may boost students' writing essays.

In the surrounding areas specifically in the context of KRI, the problem of lacking academic writing is believed to be under investigation. Based on Nasser's (2018) article, an academic essay writing competition was held only for thirty EFL Iraqi female students in a public university, which usually does not give a comprehensive picture on the problem. Therefore, it was possibly suggested that the phenomenon should be examined in similar places in order to have a general understanding on the issue. Through applying a quantitative textual analysis, the purpose of this study was therefore to look into the main writing and language difficulties faced by Kurdish English-majoring undergraduates after learning English for 12 years. Also, this study is carried out to identify the possible recommendations that may help lecturers to assist their students in enhancing writing skills.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in KRI is currently concerned about the English language programs across the region since most university classes is taught in English and post-graduation studies mostly requires international English certifications. It is therefore critical to determine and evaluate students' academic writing at the level of university, and address the barriers students encounter in this domain. Last, this research focuses on underlining the obstacles of academic writing ahead of Kurdish English-majoring students, also by reading the perspectives of lecturers described in this study, students became aware with the possible suggestions to overcome these difficulties. To this end, this study attempted to address the following research questions:

1. What writing difficulties do Kurdish English-majoring undergraduates have?
2. What are the reasons behind Kurdish English-majoring undergraduates' writing difficulties?
3. What are the possible recommendations to mitigate the writing difficulties Kurdish EFL learners face?

## 2. Materials and Methods

The present study adopted a mixed-methods approach to answer the research questions addressed in this study. More specifically, a quantitative textual analysis method was employed to investigate students' writing proficiency as well as count their writing errors across three distinctive universities. A robust sample of 60 essays was meticulously collected, and specific types of mistakes ranging from grammar, spelling, and errors related to capitalization, as well as the absence of introduction and conclusion paragraphs were systematically counted. Their academic writing was examined by means of an essay writing, aiming to identify the major writing difficulties, as proposed by Uba and Souidi (2020).

After quantifying their errors using the free version of the Grammarly application, we obtained measurable data for each essay. Grammarly's free version helped identify and categorize a variety of mistakes, including grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. This tool provided a comprehensive overview of the areas where students commonly struggled, allowing us to gather detailed and precise data for analysis. The substantial sample size and rigorous statistical analyses underscore the validity and reliability of the present approach, providing strong evidence for the use of quantitative methods in this research. Additionally, semi-structured interview sessions were also conducted to further explore the difficulties and to seek potential recommendations by lecturers to improve the EFL students' academic writing skills.

### 2.1. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection began with a support letter from the Department of English Language, where both authors were students at. Using the letter, one author contacted the other departments to get their permission for the research. The undergraduates were informed about the purpose and the objectives of the current study, and they were asked to write an academic essay about 'How to be a Successful Student at University'. The students then wrote an essay specifically for the current article. After accomplishing the quantitative phase, a verbal consent was obtained from all the 12 lecturers to express their thoughts on students' academic writing difficulties and improving their academic writing skills. The lecturers chosen for the study were selected intentionally based on their specialization in academic writing. The selection process focused on identifying lecturers who have extensive knowledge and experience in teaching and researching academic writing to ensure their insights would be highly relevant to the study's objectives.

In our research, we prioritized ethical considerations by ensuring that all participants were well-informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits of the study. We maintained standards of ethics and minimized harm, in an open and clear manner. An institutional review board approved our

study, and we were careful of cultural sensitivity at all times. Last, protecting participants' well-being and psychological state was a priority, while maintaining the integrity of our study.

Two types of data were collected in order to investigate the students' writing problems and possible recommendations to enhance their academic writing skills and overcome these difficulties. First, 60 Kurdish EFL English-majoring undergraduates (30 juniors and 30 seniors) at three English departments in three different public universities in KRI wrote an essay on the aforementioned title in a time pressure of forty-five minutes. The main rationale behind selecting junior and senior students was that they had been exposed to academic writing courses by the time of data collection for this particular study. The logic of writing essay samples was to obtain a clear and real picture about the students' academic writing difficulties to answer the studies research question number one. Ethically, the students were informed that their writing samples will not be considered as part of their course evaluation. Second, a total number of 12 lecturers from the three English departments of the same universities were interviewed to speak about students' writing difficulties and how to improve the students' academic writing skills.

To effectively address the second research question, we employed a semi-structured interview protocol. Utilizing this method, we aimed to collect and demonstrate a comprehensive insight of the lecturers' experiences, views and suggestions regarding the main writing difficulties that students encountered in their academic writing. Hence, this method provided the flexibility to delve into specific topics related to the students' academic writing challenges while also allowing for spontaneous exploration of any emergent themes or ideas that arose during the interviews. To ensure that the participants could freely express their notes and recommendations, we engaged in a face-to-face individual interview. All of the interviews were conducted in their calm offices. The lecturers who took part in this study together had a collective university teaching experience ranging from 6 to 12 years. Each interview session was designed to last approximately 20 minutes. The brief timeframe was chosen to ensure that the interviews were concise yet comprehensive, as well as respected the lecturers' busy schedules. Given that this research is not focused on individual differences or group comparisons, this study did not include descriptive statistics of demographic variables.

## **2.2. Analysis of Data**

Students' essays were then assessed and evaluated to measure their number of errors they made. Therefore, the quantified data was presented statistically using Microsoft Excel. As such, the essays were categorized into various elements of writing mistakes including errors related to capitalization, spelling, grammar, presence of the introduction paragraph and presence of the conclusion paragraph.

Similarly, the qualitative data was tape-recorded and then transcribed for the purpose of accurate analysis. Employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis allowed us to analyse the data obtained from the lecturers, including familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. Hence, the data

from interviewees were organized and prepared specifically for the purpose of the analysis.

### 3. Results

This article investigates Kurdish EFL English-majoring undergraduates' writing difficulties and how the difficulties can be possibly reduced. This section presents essay samples of the students and lecturers' interview insights about students' writing problems and possible ways to improve their essay writing. As such, these findings present whether Kurdish English-majoring students have writing difficulties and how these difficulties can possibly be reduced. The findings of this study are analysed, presented and discussed in the following sections.

#### 3.1. Quantitative Phase

Assessing Kurdish EFL undergraduates' writing skills have rarely been examined in the literature as noted earlier. This means that we need more empirical data and research findings to understand the rate of their writing problems and errors. Table 1 shows the statistical summary of the major writing problems taken from the students' writing samples. We noticed that senior students made fewer mistakes compared to juniors. Since we were not interested in comparing the frequency of mistakes between the two groups, we statistically analyzed them together.

The analysis was arranged on the basis of raw frequency rank order starting from the highest to the lowest frequencies. As it is presented in Table 1, grammar errors place the most frequent writing problem noted from the students' essay samples throughout the study. The second most frequent mistake that the students faced while writing essays was spelling mistakes. The analysis of the findings also revealed that the students had difficulties in spelling words correctly, in which they all together made 229 spelling mistakes. The third most common mistake the students made, was capitalization (176). The findings of the writing samples depicted that the sample of this study widely faced the issue of capitalization. After capitalization, absence of the conclusion paragraph ranked the fourth (40) in the order, which is followed by absence of the introduction paragraph (36) as it is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Classification of Students' Writing Problems.

No.	Category of writing problems	Frequencies of writing problems out of 60 essays
1	Grammar	313
2	Spelling	229
3	Capitalization	176
4	Absence of conclusion paragraph	40
5	Absence of introduction paragraph	36

Drawing on the students' writing samples, it was revealed that students made a number of mistakes in the above categories. Table 2 presents some of students' writing samples, and it was demonstrated that

students committed grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, and capitalization mistakes to a great extent.

**Table 2.** Classification of Students' Writing Problems

No.	Grammar	Spelling	Capitalization
1	Students always doing homework <u>in on</u> time.	mony instead of money	<u>in</u> order to be a successful student...
2	When <u>you in</u> class...	becous instead of because	<u>successful</u> student is a person...
3	When you want to be a successful <u>student uni-</u> <u>versity</u> ...	univeressty instead of univer- sity	especially <u>facebook</u> and <u>tiktok</u> take a lot of time.
4	<u>He helping</u> his friend.	defferent instead of different	<u>finally</u> , students should try better...
5	<u>He have to</u> read a lot of books...	roule instead of role	We as students of <u>koya university</u> ...
6	You can <u>chose</u> the right way...	opions instead of opinions	<u>i</u> am not a successful person.
7	When you <u>reads</u> a book...	hemun instead of human	
8	You <u>have try</u> more in order to be a good student.	gradewate instead of graduate	<u>first</u> of all, students should try hard...
9	You can't do <u>it</u> everything...	steduns instead of students	<u>in</u> the end, we have to read more...
10	<u>They students</u> should read a lot...	plai instead of play	<u>raparin university</u> is a good place...
11	Some <u>university</u> in_Kurdistan...	homwork instead of homework	<u>students</u> that study at university should...

### 3.2. Qualitative Phase

The study also collected data from lecturers pertaining to their views on the students' problems and their perceptions on how students can overcome their writing problems. Thus, two major themes were addressed in order to depict research question number two and three.

#### 3.2.1. Lecturers' Perceptions on Students' Writing Challenges

To understand students' academic writing problems and ways to enhance their writing skills, and to assist them how to overcome their difficulties, 12 lecturers of English language were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews provided in-depth information about salient aspects of students' writing problems and possible recommendations to enhance their writing skills. Having different viewpoints on students' academic writing difficulties, they viewed that students are not generally able to distinguish between formal and informal writing in which it made their writing appear poor. Some believed that although students learn writing techniques such as organization, including introduction and conclusion paragraphs, they still fail to apply them in their actual writings. Native language seems to be another reason why students produce poor writing pieces. A lecturer stated, "the reason students make so many mistakes while writing is because they are thinking in their native language rather than English." Further analysis of the qualitative inquiry revealed three primary reasons for students that mostly result in weak writing samples (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Primary Reasons for Students' Weak writing.

No.	Reasons	Descriptions
1	Linguistic Difficulties	Struggles with language use and vocabulary, affecting both meaning and usage.
2	Cognitive Difficulties	Inability to organize ideas, leading to writings that lack cohesion and coherence.
3	Lack of Linguistic Components	Poor command of English grammar and vocabulary, resulting in incorrect usage.

The interpretation of the analysis demonstrated that lecturers hold different perspectives with regards to students' low academic writing skills. With this being said, 5 lecturers argued that students lack practicing academic writing. As one of them reported, "language instructors have widely focused on teaching writing rather than engaging students in writing activities in order for them to experience sufficient writing practices." Other lecturers argued that students' writing skills appear to be poor because their lecturers do not teach academic writing skills effectively. Also, other lecturers stated that another possible reason for students' poor writing skills could be that students always attempt to pass exams but not to improve their writing and learn how to produce good writing pieces. Drawing on the qualitative data analysis, one lecturer identified three possible reasons about why students experience writing difficulties (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Reasons for Writing Difficulties.

No.	Reasons	Descriptions
1	Interlingua errors	Students apply L1 rules and transfer vocabularies through word-for-word translation.
2	Intralingua errors	Students attempt to improve writing but struggle due to a lack of sufficient linguistic knowledge.
3	Lack of experience	Students lack experience in writing because they have not practiced adequately, even at the tertiary education level.

Discoveries of this analysis also revealed that lack of background information could also be another prime reason that make students weak and ineffective. Others also state that students are not concerned about academic writing with regards to including introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs in their writings as one of the teachers responded:

"To the best of my experience, most of the written essays by my students suffered from inadequate introduction, body and conclusion paragraphs, which is often resulted their essays weak. The reason for that is due to lack of information about academic writing. I mean my students have no sufficient information how to write in an effective way or how to improve their academic writing skills."

Another lecturer also believed that his students simply focus on what they know rather than writing academically and correctly. Particularly, when he provoked "what I see from their essays is that the majority of them do not think how to write accurately. He also added that "there are even lots of unnecessary information in their essays which determine that they don't think before writing." Extracting insights from the

analysis, students' cognitive and reading skills could probably be another central reason that make students incapable of producing effective writing pieces. The interviewees claimed that students are usually interested in pamphlets not regular books to improve their cognitive skills as well as background information on topics relevant at tertiary level education.

### 3.2.2. Lecturers' Suggestions on Students' Academic Writing Improvement

Six lecturers agreed that language instructors may need to change their teaching writing courses alongside with their techniques of lecturing. As one of the lecturers stated, "engaging students in more academic writing activities could be a productive technique that may assist students improve their writing." Additionally, there was a consensus among the lecturers in suggesting various programmes. For example, they suggested that writing modules should incorporate several essay writings as a part of their course evaluation. 7 of interviewees also noted that students need to think and plan their writing before they write, then review and revise what they have written. As a lecturer suggested, "I prefer my students to revise any piece of writing before handing it to me because this revision will elevate the quality of their writing pieces a lot." This is an effective technique that help students to commit less mistakes in their writing, which later results in a well-formed essay. Moreover, some of them (4 lecturers) recommended another technique that the essay topics should be common and general in academic writing activities in order to have enough ability and control over the topic. Two lecturers noted "more writing modules should be included in the syllabus simply because students would practice more frequently and in essence, enhancing their writing." Specifically, they suggested to include those writing modules in the first two years of their education to practice early in their English language education, which leads to previous background on their English language skills especially writing skills.

## 4. Discussion

The current study focuses on the most common mistakes that Kurdish English-majoring students encounter while writing academic essays. Certainly, it is followed by EFL lecturers' understandings and impressive recommendations to have an overview of the phenomenon. This section discusses the major findings as well as compares the results of the current study to those of earlier studies on the students' writing difficulties. It also discusses suggestions from the interviewees in the study to enhance writing skills, and suggestions proposed by them. The study highlighted the differences and similarities between students' previous academic writing tests by previous researchers and current academic expectations. The quantitative textual analysis revealed common writing mistakes, such as grammar, spelling, and capitalization errors. It also showed the absence of introduction and conclusion paragraphs, which is consistent with previous research findings. The results of this study showed that students frequently produced essays packed

with mistakes in grammar, which is in line with Alfaqiri's (2018) findings that such errors are common in students' essays. In addition, the study discovered that students commit a significant number of spelling errors, a finding that supports the existing literature (Al-Khairi, 2013; Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010) that students frequently make spelling mistakes in their essays. The outcomes also underscored that capitalization is counted as a challenge for students during the writing process. A similar result was found by Shweba and Mujiyanto (2017), who demonstrated that capitalization is one of the most common issues that students encounter while writing. The analysis of the students' essay samples proved that a variety of errors left the samples weak.

Furthermore, the students struggled with composing suitable introduction and conclusion paragraphs. Pertaining to essay analysis, the study's findings revealed that among the 30 third-grade undergraduates, only 10 of them managed to accurately write the introduction paragraph, while just 8 could accurately write the concluding paragraph. Similarly, only 12 fourth-grade undergraduates were able to write the conclusion paragraph accurately, while 14 out of 30 fourth-graders were able to write the introduction paragraph correctly. Same results were found by other studies (e.g., Ahmed, 2010; Uba & Souidi, 2020). Particularly, Uba and Souidi's (2020) investigation on students' essay analysis who indicated that only 15 students were able to write correct introductions and 16 students write proper conclusion paragraphs out of 40 students.

Students committed spelling errors of letter omission, addition, transposition and substitution, etc. For example, attactive (attractive), together (together), favoriet (favorite), famas (famous), etc. Presumably, a lot of spelling mistakes occurred especially the pronoun "I" and writing a letter as an uppercase and others as a lower case based on specific rules, e.g. "when i meet the writer jafariqbal in the ekushaey fair..." (correct version: when I meet the writer Jafar Iqbal in the Ekushaey Fair...). By examining the students' essays, we can presume that apart from grammar, spelling and capitalization issues, they largely faced difficulties in including the introduction and conclusion paragraphs correctly and effectively. More importantly, by looking at the third and fourth grade students' writing essays, we can clearly observe that fourth-grade students' writing abilities outperform the third-grade students' essays, yet a major proportion of both grades are still unable to compose accurate introduction and conclusion paragraphs. However, we did not analyse the comparison between junior and senior students with regards to the frequency of the mistakes they made, but we noticed that senior students made mistakes to a lesser extent. This proved that their writing skills have improved more compared to third-graders. Last, the findings exhibit that students

failed to write an effective essay, and we therefore have the impression that the Kurdish EFL English-majoring students may seem weak in writing essays correctly and construct clear paragraphs in their academic writing as it can be seen in the literature (Ahmed, 2010; Javid & Umer, 2014; Xiao & Chen, 2015).

Some of the lecturers stated that the three most frequent problems that students encounter while writing are grammar, spelling, and capitalization. This is in agreement with the findings presented by past research (e.g., Alfakiri, 2018; Al-Khairi, 2013; Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010; Mwangi, 2017), who found that students' most common writing problems are related to grammar, spelling, capitalization and vocabulary. Another issue that some of the interviewees believe include that students struggle to organize and generate thoughts, and simply write what they thought. The same result was found by Javid and Umer (2014). The lecturers also highlighted the restricted amount of knowledge as a prominent issue ahead of students because they usually do not value reading as Ahmed (2010) claimed the same in his article.

When it comes to suggestions by the teachers in order to overcome these issues by students and assist them to accelerate their quality of writing various recommendations were offered during the interviews. Thinking before writing is one of the most repeatable suggestions among the lecturers, and they suggested that students should not write immediately, they have to establish the coherence of the text. This being said, there was a strong analogy with Sulistyaningrum and Avianka's (2021) findings, who concluded that students should consider 3 steps when they begin to write including; thinking, what to say, and then write. Various techniques were among the recommendations, and similar results can be touched in Peel's (2014) article, who underlined that EFL lecturers are expected to apply a variety of ways to effectively teach students how to write. For example, implementing writing programs was offered by instructors to help students' academic writing, and as Duong (2018) proposed, universities should offer programs to improve their students' academic writing and speaking abilities. However, all lecturers insisted that reading should not be underestimated because reading has a significant influence on enhancing the quality of writing. Therefore, this suggestion is in contrast with Hu's (2022) study, who counted writing as one of the most impactable techniques that helps learners become more academic and accurate writers by improving their writing ability.

To improve students' writing skills, educators and EFL lecturers can introduce university programs focusing on academic writing, integrate writing modules in the curriculum, offer workshops and tutoring sessions, and use various teaching methods such as peer editing and multimedia resources. Emphasizing

the importance of reading for writing proficiency, educators can create a supportive environment where students read widely, analyze writing styles, and engage in discussions to enhance their overall writing abilities. By collaborating and implementing these strategies, educators can help students develop essential writing skills like grammar, spelling, and essay structuring effectively.

In conclusion, findings from our research contribute to academic writing in public universities in the context of KRI. It presented insights into major language and writing difficulties that EFL university students face in academic writing. Public universities in KRI should consider this challenge as crucial and identify necessary actions to be taken in pursuit of students' academic writing betterment. In essence, they are expected to introduce strategic writing practices to be effectively practiced.

## 5. Conclusions and Future Research Considerations

This research investigated students' writing problems and determined some of the most common errors they made in their essays. We also had conversations with twelve instructors in order to get their opinions on the issues students encounter in academic writing in three public universities. The present contribution revealed that students' writing samples have issues including, the absence of an introduction and conclusion paragraphs. Therefore, we received some advice from instructors on how students may write more comprehensive essays and develop their academic writing skills. The research outcomes clearly revealed that fourth-graders make less writing errors than third-graders, as the findings yielded. Instructors recommended that in order to overcome academic writing difficulties, students should read frequently, think, arrange thoughts, avoid writing immediately and utilize various educational strategies as suggested by the lecturers. What we found in this study could lead to some specific developments that we change the way we teach academic writing at the tertiary level in public universities specifically in KRI.

This study may have implications for English language education in KRI, in which it affects Kurdish English-majoring students' academic writing skills. Addressing these challenges that Kurdish EFL undergraduates face informs the readers or any concerning party in this regard, as it leads EFL lecturers to have a general background of students' weaknesses in academic writing. In essence, this may enhance their opportunities for further education and career advancement in English academic environments.

Despite the seminal findings this study offers, the study suffers from a number of limitations. First, only third and fourth-grade undergraduates took part in this research through essay writing samples. Future investigations are therefore recommended to take all four stages to gather richer data for the purpose of having a better picture on the phenomenon. Another limitation is that this research involved 60 students from three public universities, therefore; it is suggested that future research projects may contribute more students and universities in their studies to make the data more comprehensive for the purpose of drawing

more generalizations. Because of the inherent limitations of its specific context, this research, which is located in a specific setting (KRI), could not be entirely relevant to other cultural, geographical, or organizational places. Moving forward, it is essential for further researchers to explore these phenomena in various contexts to address the limitations associated with the current study's scope. Although much has remained to be achieved, we hope that the ideas presented here will improve pedagogical practice in this very important area.

**Declaration of Competing Interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing of interest.

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