

# The strategies of academic writing in writing researches and theses of Postgraduates at Duhok Polytechnic University

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## Abstract

Learning writing skill is the most difficult task for the second language students in Duhok Polytechnic university in particular and Iraqi universities in general. However, academic writing is considered one of the most difficult types of writing. (Torrance & Thomas, 1994: 379) stated “Academic writing is difficult. It requires a complex combination of generating ideas, selecting the ideas that are appropriate to the writing task, translating these into text and polishing the text to produce a presentable document”.

This paper reveals a study conducted as a qualitative research to analyze the writing strategies. The aim of this study was to determine the types of writing strategies used by English language teachers and postgraduate students, and the purpose for choosing postgraduate student was considered suitable because it was believed that texts written by them would be more academic in expressing their ideas and would consist of correct writing conventions as well as dissonance in order to accommodate their readers compared with that of less proficient writers (Best, 1995).

This study addressed the following research main questions: What are the writing strategies used by DPU postgraduate students when they compose their papers in English? And what are the strategies used by the English language teachers. To answer these questions, writing strategies questionnaire was employed and distributed among 50 DPU postgraduate students, of these, 40 were returned. Analyses of the findings revealed that both English language teachers and postgraduate students at DPU shared common writing strategies. Moreover, the teachers used certain effective writing strategy, however, the students employed a wide variety of strategies. Finally, the study came across a range of recommendations, in which the most important was:

The study suggested that English language teachers should increase student’s exposure to all four skills with specific emphasis on writing.

## I. Introduction

This study contributes to the study of the writing strategies use of non-English postgraduate students in Duhok Polytechnic university (DPU) setting. It is believed that the writing skill is the most neglected skill in most of educational industry in Kurdistan region of Iraq leading in low writing among postgraduate students. Moreover, most students, low and high achievers alike, find writing difficult and view it as something they just have to persevere through in order to pass certain exams (Yavuz & Genç, 1998).

“Mastering English writing skill requires a complex combination of generating ideas, selecting the ideas that are appropriate to the writing task, translating these into text and polishing the text to produce a presentable document (Torrance et al 1994)”.

(Rahmawati et al 2019 p: 35) state “many students still find difficulties in producing words in their writing. “Thus, writing strategies are important in increasing learner’s writing ability”. (Ismail et al.,2012) pointed out that most ESL students are apprehensive to writing activity and have negative attitude to academic writing.

Usually, the students who perceive writing as difficult, would dislike the activity.

Therefore, this study attempts to identify the writing strategies adopted by postgraduate students at DPU, thus, they must should focus more on writing skills and writing strategies. Moreover, this study helps the educational institutions, especially universities and institutes, besides, other institutions to

Hence, the research included a set of sections, including theoretical and methodological, such as the research problem, its objectives and hypotheses. As well as the definitions of writing strategy. As for the boundaries of the research, the research time frame was limited to postgraduate students between the academic year 2020-2021. The research also includes working on the description and analyzing the research sample and describing the analysis of variables. In addition to the conclusions paragraph.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholars and writers have different views of understanding the concept of "writing strategy". Torrance et al., 2000 in Penuelaz, (2012: 83) pointed out that writing strategy is defined as the sequence in which a writer engages in planning, composing, revising and other writing related activities.

Oxford (1990: 14) specified Learning strategies as "steps taken by the learner to facilitate the acquisition, retrieval, or use of information."

A scholar such as Amari (2013, p. 130) suggested that writing strategies are keys affecting writing quality. Thus, it is strongly indicated that the student's writing is influenced by his or her writing strategies which are employed during writing process. In fact, the researcher sees that preferred writing strategies help students to increase their writing quality.

In regards to the strategies used by the students, the findings of the study of Kalaivaani Aluemalai and Mahendran Maniam (2020) showed that the learners used various strategies such as mechanics of writing relating the task with experience, talk writing, freewriting, outlining, listing, online materials and seeking help and test arrangement of writing.

Asmari (2013) proposed that writing strategies are keys affecting writing quality. In fact, the researcher saw that preferred writing strategies help students to increase their writing quality.

Finding of a study conducted by Sukmawan (2016) revealed that several efforts the students do to improve their writing skill, among others are practice writing, reading a lot for knowledge and ideas, and using diary writing. (Freedman et al., 2014) stated "professional writers play with language to create imaginative and compelling texts. The process of writing suggests that the students are actually taught how to write with coherence, acceptable spellings, and appropriate grammar structure in second language. The results of Al Asmari (2013) study indicated that students with low writing anxiety were more users of writing strategies than the high anxious ones. Moreover, a significant negative correlation was found between students' writing apprehension and their writing achievement. Imani and Habil (2012) explored the writing strategies incorporated by the Arab postgraduate students in their dissertation and thesis writing and found significant patterns of academic writing problems across both types of writing. The outcomes of the study of (Chen 2011: 245) provided much insight into English writing teaching. Firstly, although students can frequently make use of some strategies, such as identifying strategies and compensation strategies, other strategies are receiving relatively insufficient attention. So teachers can spend some time introducing these strategies to make students to be aware of all the writing strategies available scores. Secondly, from the descriptive analysis of the three types of stage strategies, it can be seen that the revising stages are to some extent neglected; therefore, the teachers should introduce the process approach to the English writing teaching.

The findings (Imelda Hermilinda and Abd Aziz 2018: 1836) showed that the proficient student writers were familiar with the writing stages. Five stages of the writing process were found: prewriting, planning, drafting, pausing and reading and revising and editing.

Regarding the strategies used by gender, the results of the study of Peñuelas (2012) revealed that women also use more strategies than men in terms of both categories and individual strategies

Based on the abovementioned finding of different scholars, this study extracts the following academic writing strategies definition: Academic writing strategies are specific skills used by learners (postgraduate students) to improve their progress in writing their academic and scientific essays or academic papers and reports.

### 3. Methodology

This study is quantitative in nature as the data was obtained through an online questionnaire which was designed to be along the lines of the research hypotheses. The questionnaire was electronically sent online to the targeted instructors and DPU students to propose better strategies of their preference to improve and overcome the challenges of academic writing.

#### 3.1 Population

EFL teachers and postgraduate students of Duhok Polytechnic university (DPU) of Kurdistan region, Iraq, symbolize the population of this study. The questionnaires was adapted to collect quantitative data and to bring about information from the 40 EFL students that were returned. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured by Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) program.

#### 3.2 Sampling

The sample number is 40 EFL post graduate students. The investigator believes that this number is sufficient to accomplish the objective of the study. The postgraduate students are selected from selected campuses at Duhok Polytechnic University from different places and different fields of study.

#### 3.3 Statement of the Problem

Many students at DPU suffer from weakness in English language proficiency in general and English academic writing in particular. There is a huge difference between the first language (language1=mother language) and English as a foreign language (language 2) in terms of grammar, structure, organization, and style. The postgraduate students at DPU desire to listen and speak rather than read and write. In compliance with the above statement, DPU students prefer to practice English through speaking and listening skills, but not in writing, since they spend most of their learning time speaking the language rather than writing it. Therefore, the researcher believes that the problem might stem from the fear of making mistakes and being corrected form their peers or teachers.

#### 3.4 Questions of the study

This study diagnosed the following questions:

- What are the strategies that the English language teachers use at DPU?
- What are the strategies employed by postgraduate students while writing their academic papers?

#### 3.5 Description of the individuals examined:

The questionnaire has been distributed among 50 postgraduate students who were preparing their master and PhD decertations. Of these, returned 40 were retuned for analysis, i.e. the response rate was (90%).

Table (1) shows the distribution of the participants examined according to their individual characteristics.

Table (1) description of participants

				Gender	
		Male			Female
No	%		No.	%	
25	65		14	35	
				Age	

25-30		31-40		41-50		51 over	
No		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
6	15%	26	65	7	17.5	1	2.5
Academic Degree							
PhD		Master		Bachelor		others	
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
2	5	27	67.5	10	25	1	2.5

By describing the respondents, it was found that the percentage of the respondents was (65%) and the percentage of females was (35%). This indicates the presence of a male component interested in higher studies, in contrast to what was confirmed in his study by (Peñuelas, 2012: 77), where the female component was more used for academic writing strategies. “women also use more strategies than men in terms of both categories and individual strategies”.

It was also found through the description of the respondents that the age group (31-40) had more opportunities to study a master's degree, as their percentage was higher (67%), while the age group (51 and over) as the percentage was (2.5) had less opportunity to go for higher studies.

#### 4. Results Analysis

The data which was gathered through the questionnaires were used and analyzed using SPSS program, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means and standard deviations, were calculated to show the teachers and students' use of writing strategies.

The data from the questionnaire respondents were analyzed in two stages. First, the questions

relating to writing strategies were analyzed to identify the strategies that English language teachers used. Second, the questions relating to writing strategy were analyzed to identify the strategies that employed by postgraduate students at DPU.

The questionnaire was electronically sent to the subjects, and they were required to respond to it during their free time. The English language teachers and their students were given a few days to complete the questionnaire. The researcher was continuously following up the results on Google Drive, where it is possible to see the subjects' responses at once. Quantitative analysis was used to analyze the data using (spss) program.

#### 5. Description and diagnosis of study variables:

This part deals with the description and diagnosis of the academic writing strategies that were referred to in the theoretical aspect of the study. Table (4 and 5) show the frequency distributions, percentages, mean and standard deviation values at the level of the study sample.

Table (2) Frequency distributions, proportions, means and standard deviations at the level of the research university (n = 13) strategies used by the students

Variables	Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation

	No.	%	No	%	NO	%	NO	%	%	%		
X1	3	7.5	19	47.5	11	27.5	7	17.5	~	~	3.4500	0.875
X2	6	15	25	62.5	2	0.5	3	7.5	4	10	3.6500	1.144
X3	10	25	18	45	7	13	1	2.5	10	25	3.8250	1.195
X4	11	27.5	15	37.5	7	7.5	3	7.5	11	27.5	3.650	1.251
X5	14	35	10	25	5	12.5	9	22.5	2	5	3.625	1.314
X6	11	27.5	14	35	5	12.5	8	20	2	5	3.600	1.236
X7	12	30	13	32.5	7	17.5	6	15	2	5	3.675	1.206
X8	2	5	21	52.5	10	25%	6	15	1	2.5	3.425	0.902
X9	6	15	15	37.5	10	25	7	17.5	2	5	3.400	1.104
X10	5	12.5	17	42.5	11	27.5	7	17.5	~	~	3.5000	0.933
X11	8	20	20	50	7	17.5	3	7.5	2	5	3.725	1.037
X12	3	7.5	11	27.5	15	37.5	8	20	3	7.5	3.075	1.047
X13	10	25	17	42.5	7	17.5	4	10	2	5	3.725	1.109

The table is created by the researcher based on (spss v.22) program

**A: Strategies related to the teachers in academic writing and the variables of this part focused on (X1-X13), and it has been noted from the table as follows:**

1. X1) Indicates that the percentage of agreement about this variable by the respondents was (55%), as the teacher determines and corrects academic writing errors. The mean of this variable was (3.45) and the standard deviation is (0.875).
2. X2) Shows that the percentage of agreement concerning this variable by the respondents was (77.5%), as the teacher assigns students the daily activities and duties in the classroom about academic writing. The mean of this variable was (3.650) and the standard deviation was (1.144).
3. X3) Illustrates the percentage of the agreement about this variable by the respondents was (70%) as English language teacher give students opportunities to practice writing in

English. The mean of this variable was (3.825) and the standard deviation was (1.195).

4. X4) Demonstrates that the percentage agreement concerning this variable by the respondents was (65%) as the teacher encourages teamwork/pair work between students. The mean of this variable was (3.650) and the standard deviation was (1.251).

5. X5) Indicates that the percentage agreement of this variable by the respondents was (60%) as the teachers are interested in modern techniques for academic writing. The mean of this variable was (3.625) and the standard deviation was (1.314).

6. X6) ) Shows that the percentage agreement of this variable by the respondents was (60%) as the teachers have knowledge of the rules of academic writing. The mean of this variable was (3.600) and the standard deviation was (1.236).

7. X7) Signifies that the percentage agreement of this variable by the respondents was (62.5%) as the teachers obliges students to read English books and academic research. The mean of this variable was ((3.675) and the standard deviation was (1.206).

8. X8) Illustrates the percentage agreement of this variable by the respondents was (52.5%) as the teacher builds confidence in the student's writing abilities. The mean of this variable was (3.400) and the standard deviation was (1.104).

9. X9) Demonstrates that the agreement percentage of this variables by the respondents was (55%) as the teacher encourages students to use English language and interact with English native speakers. The mean of this variable was (3.500) and the standard deviation was (0.933).

10. X10) Shows that the agreement percentage of this variables by the respondents was (70%) as the teacher takes academic writing seriously. The mean of this variable was (3.725) and the standard deviation was (1.037).

11. X11) Indicates that the percentage agreement of this variable by the respondents

was (35%) as the teacher uses teaching aids and modern techniques in academic writing. The mean of this variable was (3.075) and the standard deviation (1.047).

12. X12) Illustrates that the percentage agreement of this variables by the respondents was (67.5%) as the teacher uses traditional teaching methods in academic writing. The mean of this variable was (3.725) and standard deviation was (1.109).

13. X13) Shows that the agreement percentage of this variable by the respondents was (60%) as the teacher assigns writing assignments in class and during student free time. The mean of this variable was (3.735) and the standard deviation was (1.109).

Table (3) Frequency distributions, proportions, means and standard deviations at the level of the research university (n = 6) strategies used by the students

Variables	Strongly agree		agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	Standard Deviation
	No.	%	No	%	NO	%	NO	%	%	%		
X14	8	20	16	40	12	30	8	20	1	2.5	3.8750	1.25167
X15	5	12.5	22	55	7	17.5	3	7.5	3	7.5	3.5750	1.05945
X16	8	20	11	27.5	14	35	7	17.5	~	~	3.5000	1.01274
X17	5	12.5	8	20	10	25	12	30	5	12.5	2.9000	1.23621
X18	6	15	17	42.5	10	25	6	15	1	2.5	3.5250	1.01242
X19	6	15	25	62.5	5	12.5	3	7.5	1	2.5	3.8000	0.88289

The table is created by the researcher based on (spss v.22) program

**B: Strategies related to the students in academic writing and the variables of this part focused on (X14-X19), it has been noted from table (3) as follows:**

14. X14) Shows that the percentage agreement concerning this variable by the respondents was (60%) as the students receive

clear instructions on how to perform a writing task. The mean of this variable was (3.875) and the standard deviation was (1.251).

15. X15) Reveals that the agreement percentage of this variable by the respondents was (67.5%) as the students receive an adequate guidance and instructions on how to perform the writing task. The mean of this variable was (3.575) and the standard deviation was (1.059).

16. X16) Indicates that the agreement percentage about this variable by the

respondents was (47.5%) as the writing assignments are based on students' needs and abilities. The mean of this variable was (2.900) and the standard deviation was (1.236).

17. X17) Shows that the agreement percentage of this variable by the respondents was (33%) as the focus of the students is on the conversation only. The mean of this variable was (3.525) and the standard deviation was (1.023).

18. X18) Appears that the percentage agreement concerning this variable by the respondents was (57.5%) as the students realize the importance of scientific writing. The mean of this variable was (3.525) and the standard deviation was (0.882).

19. X19) Demonstrates that the percentage agreement of this variables by the respondents was (77.5%) as the students are required to do their writing homework. The mean of this variable was (3.800) and the standard deviation was (1.102).

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

In the light of the research results in the theoretical and practical aspects, it has been concluded the following:

### a. Conclusions

1. There is a difference in the view of respondents concerning the concept of academic writing strategies.

2. There is no agreement about the strategies used in academic writing among postgraduate students at Duhok Technical University, thus, this research attempted to identify two important strategies, first; strategies used by the teaching staff which were implemented by students, and second; the strategies employed by poststudents.

3. The results of the descriptive analysis indicated that the majority of the respondents' answers confirmed that they used academic writing strategies in their research.

4. The results of the descriptive analysis indicated that the majority of the respondents' answers confirmed that the teachers used the following strategies:

a. The students are required to do their writing homework

b. English language teacher takes academic writing seriously.

c. English language teachers give students opportunities to practice writing in English

5. Some of the respondents' answers, through descriptive analysis, showed that the following strategy is used:

a. The teacher uses traditional teaching methods in academic writing

6. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that many of the respondents' answers focused on using the following strategies:

a. The teacher encourages teamwork/pair work between students

b. The teachers are interested in modern techniques for academic writing

c. The teachers have knowledges of the rules of academic writing.

7. Moreover, the results of the descriptive analysis showed that respondents' answers were agreed on the following strategy:

a. Students are required to do their writing homework.

8. The results of descriptive analysis demonstrated that respondents' answers focused on the following strategies:

a. The students receive clear instructions on how to perform the writing task

b. The students receive an adequate guidance and instructions on how to perform the writing task

9. The results of descriptive analysis showed that some of the respondents' answers focused on the following strategies:

a. Focus of the students is on the conversation only

b. The students realize the importance of scientific writing

### B. Recommendations

By reviewing the most important conclusions, the most imperative recommendations can be suggested as follows:

1. The study recommends the need to focus on modern strategies related to academic writing in their application in the study curriculum.

2. The necessity of the participation of English language teachers in the modern curricula currently in force in writing research in advanced and discreet international journals.

3. The study recommends the need to constantly pay attention to the following strategies:

a. The teacher assigns students the daily activities and duties in the classroom about academic writing.

b. English language teachers give students opportunities to practice writing in English.

c. The teacher uses teaching aids and modern techniques in academic writing through programs and training courses.

4. The study recommends that students should be assigned duties and focus on them in the lecture in developing the students' abilities and capabilities and acquiring skills and experience in writing research papers in an academic manner. The provision of academic workshops on improving the English language proficiency of Arab postgraduates along with regular lectures and seminars on research writing, thesis organization, grammar and paraphrasing will help the students to overcome their existing problems in academic writing. (Almatarneh., et al 2018)

5. The necessity of obligating students to implement and reinforce the instructions of academic writing methods through frequent tests and presenting homework and discussing them in the lecture.

6. Supporting the application of modern methods in the accomplishment of duties related to academic writing.

7. The study recommends focusing on speaking and writing in discussions both inside and outside the lecture.

8. It is more recommended that postgraduate students should implement all strategies used by teachers and students in order to achieve more success in academic writing. (Torrance et al., 2000) shows that high achievers report greater use of all strategies than low achievers.

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