

Investigating the Problems of Organization and Vocabulary in Academic Writing Encountered by Students at Postgraduate Level

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Abstract

There are several elements that are essential to create a quality piece of writing. Organization and vocabulary are the most important elements of an academic essay that often seems to be overlooked by students. Typically, organization refers to the larger parts of a piece of writing, although it also refers to how paragraphs and sentences are written and how accurately words are put together to convey ideas. An organized essay is clear, focused, logical and effective. The present study aims to investigate vocabulary and organizational issues in English academic writing (AW) faced by Pakistani students. The purpose of this study was to analyze issues students face while writing academically on postgraduate level. A mixed methods approach was applied to this study. A questionnaire survey was designed and conducted on 50 MPhil level students including males and females. The findings reveal that Pakistani students consider AW as an important subject. However, they face a number of issues in their writing such as weak writing expressions, grammatical and syntactical issues and seek to overcome their writing deficiencies. Study also identifies a number of other factors that cause these issues in students' writing.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Sentence Structure, Organization, Feedback*

1. Introduction

HEC (Higher Education Commission) since its conversion from UGC (University Grants Commission) to its modern form had been performing a sustainably vital role towards development of higher education in country, through awarding hundreds of doctoral scholarships annually (Laghari, 2009). HEC can also be given a credit to establish a number of new universities and other degree awarding campuses across the country between year 2003 and 2008 (The DAWN, 2010). Moreover, results produced by HEC in increasing number of international research publications from 600 research papers to 4300 from year 2003 to 2008 are highly commendable (Annual Report HEC, 2012, p.13). English, being a widespread international language has gained a considerable attention for its extensive use within social, economic, pedagogical and academic domains. English language proficiency in Pakistan had been carrying a considerable debate since decades and AW is considered a crucial aspect in this regard. Since AW is a requirement to extend the research work in the universities of Pakistan, its role in the education system of Pakistan, particularly at postgraduate and higher education level is predominant. Writing is considered a productive and one of the basic four skills (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) of language and it is always been given a significant place in second language learning. Thus, acquiring English writing proficiency is often considered a complex and challenging skill for both native and non-native users (Kroll, 1990).

It is generally believed that students are required to achieve mastery in these skills to b Importance of English language in Pakistan can evidently be measured by the phenomenon that students' academic success and career development primarily relies on the sufficient competency of English Speaking in the country. Ghani (2003) believes English is not only important to pursue further education, it is also a “doorway to access white collar jobs in the country” .Moreover, English is also given an important place in contemporary linguistic world.

Unlike non academic writing, academic writing is generally referred to a particular style of writing that defines the intellectual boundaries of various disciplines. AW has its own style and conventions. The main purpose of this type of writing is not to entertain the reader rather to provide accurate information on a particular subject (Altakhaine, 2010).AW is different than other types of writings such as personal and informal writing. It is generally believed that AW is cohesive and considerably logical in its tone. Additionally, AW is expected to be precise, impersonal and objective in nature. According to Prinz and Arnbjornsdottir (2013), AE (Academic English) is based on a fixed formal register and has a complex grammatical structure along with number of other components such as an impersonal tone, objectivity, preciseness, organized structure and use of cautious language. Similarly, Surono (2015) explains AW a form of writing that is formal in nature and owns certain standard conventions. Al Fadda (2012, p.124) seems to go a level further while explaining AW a cognitive process that involves variety of purposes such as: comprehension of ideas, problem solving, expressing certain concepts and also explaining abstract ideas that usually seem to be inexplicable. In Pakistan English is taught as a compulsory subject from primary school to higher secondary level. Students are required to write academic papers at bachelors, masters and higher education level primarily in English. It is therefore imperative for students to acquire excellent competency in English AW to undertake future research projects successfully (Badenhorst & Brill, 2015, p.389). However, in the context of Pakistan, it is important to know that the postgraduate students are required to have developed AW skills such as the use of correct academic vocabulary and the organization of writing structure. The discourse of AW requires proficiency in the application of sound grammatical knowledge and academic vocabulary in order to produce a quality text (Hyland, 2003).

1.1 Research Questions

Following questions were answered after collecting data from quantitative and qualitative resources.

- 1) What are the perceptions of Pakistani (MPhil) students about academic writing and its components?
- 2) What type of vocabulary and organizational issues create problem for Pakistani students in academic writing?
- 3) What are teachers' perceptions of possible causes of these vocabulary and organizational issues in academic writing?

2. Literature Review

English is being taught as a compulsory subject and considered an integral part of curriculum in many developing countries including Pakistan. Therefore, English for academic purpose seems prevalent across the world and EAP (English for academic Purpose) programs seem to flourish in many parts of Asia (Liyanage & Walker, 2014). Apart from its social and economic significance an increasing demand of English language in academia also makes this language flourish rapidly in today's world. For instance, it is claimed that more than 65% of professional international journal articles are written in English (Hess & Ghawi, 1997).

Since AW is a particular genre it has its own defined and standard structure. For example, Medawar (1964) describes IMARAD (Introduction, method, results and discussion) as a typical standard formula that should be followed in AW. According to IMARD, the first section in the structure of AW is introduction where a relevant background is given related to the research study. Therefore, a writer is required to give adequate information regarding subject of the study to make it clear to the readers. Introductions should provide sufficient information to the reader so that “they could be able to understand and evaluate the results of the present study without referring it back to the previous publications on the topic (Gastel (2006, pp. 57-8)”. Second step is methodology which is also a

significant phase in the structure of AW and demands a writer to be vigilant and relatively more skilful. Researchers are required to explain method they use to obtain data to support their arguments. Third step is to provide appropriate conclusion and then in the end there should be discussion where writer is required to explain major details of their work.

2.1 Vocabulary in Academic Writing

Vocabulary plays a significant role in writing and can be defined as a powerful carrier of meaning as it provides knowledge of words and their meanings (Hubbard, 1983). However, a conventional definition of vocabulary is that it is about the words of a language, but in fact vocabulary is much more than merely single word in language. According to Nation & Meara (2010), English vocabulary has layers of meanings which have their connection to the root words. Vocabulary has three main aspects such as, form, meaning and use. In broader terms there are two more terms of vocabulary which are called “lexis” and “lexicon” and thus often seem replaceable (Amvela, 2000, p. 11). According to Nation (2001), words in vocabulary usually fall into three tiers. Firstly, there are high frequency words and do not seem to include multiple meaning words. Almost eighty percent of these words are found in the running text. Second type of words is referred as academic words which have nine percent contribution running text. Thirdly, there are technical words and five percent of the running text is made up by these words. The Fourth type is referred as low frequency words which typically fall into the moderate frequency words and do not seem to intervene in the high frequency words list. Almost five percent of the academic text is made up of these words.

2.2 What is Academic Vocabulary?

Academic vocabulary is variously known as sub -technical vocabulary. Academic vocabulary is formal in nature and formality is what distinguishes an academic piece of writing from an ordinary piece of writing, such as common letters, personal emails and stories etc. Since vocabulary is a significant part of written discourse there is an important connection between vocabulary, language proficiency and academic achievement. Furthermore, idea of an academic vocabulary has a long history in teaching English for academic and specific purposes (Milton & Daller, 2013). According to Hyland (2009), “academic discourse refers to the ways of thinking and using language which exist in the academy”. Warner (2009) seems to define AW as a formal way to write a well-structured paper by using additional formal vocabulary, accurate grammar and logical sentence structure.

2.3 Importance of Vocabulary in Academic Writing

Vocabulary has a significant impact on individuals’ life. It is believed that with an insufficient vocabulary a person cannot communicate effectively and having inadequate vocabulary may also impede students ‘achievement of learning a foreign language effectively (Zhihong, 2000). Unfortunately, vocabulary learning had been an underestimated practice in second language learning research for years. For instance, Tylor (1990) highlights vocabulary had been a neglected subject for a long time while it is relatively indispensable in second language learning process. It was only since 1980 when vocabulary was given a significant place in SLA (Second Language Acquisition) research (Scurfield, 2003). It was thirty years back when a study by Santos (1988) published in TESOL drew attention to the importance of vocabulary knowledge in AW. Santos conducted a research to investigate the reactions of 178 university professors in multiple disciplines based on two essays written by non-native speakers. The findings of the study revealed that the professors evaluated the content and language separately and they seem to tolerate linguistic errors when they could understand the content. However, they did not seem to overlook lexical errors. Santos concluded that writing courses should include important instructions on vocabulary building and selection of words (p. 85). Thus, to read and write academic texts effectively students need to be familiar with the vocabulary generally used in the academic context (Bailey, 2006)

2.4 What is Cohesion and Coherence?

The notion of cohesion was explained by Halliday and Hasan (1976) in their theory of cohesive ties. The major concern of their study was to investigate how the correlation in text occurs. According to Halliday and Hasan, there are “cohesive ties” that keep various parts of different. For example, Enkvist (1990) defines coherence as the quality that keeps text cohesive and interpretable (14). Coherence is achieved through the arrangement of ideas in a logical order. Furthermore, a reader

uses simple and complex patterns to develop a coherent text. Coherence is where unity of ideas lies as a complete whole. (Brostoff, 1981)

2.5 Causes and factors of Vocabulary and Organizational issues in Academic Writing

Vocabulary knowledge and organizational structure are critical factors in AW. It is noticed that vocabulary knowledge plays a pivotal role in language learning. Vocabulary and cohesion and coherence are crucial for L2 writing in general and for AW in particular. Therefore, it is necessary for writers to attain substantial knowledge about these important aspects of writing. Writing in English is often a complex task. It is observed that EFL learners have double pressures while writing in English as firstly, they have to write in English which itself is never an easy task for them as a second language learner. Secondly, they are required to write in an academic way which is again is reasonably challenging. In Asia, majority of students seem to suffer from weak AW expressions including Pakistan and vocabulary is a real challenge in this regard. The conventions of AW demand writers to know the special language requirements of academic genres and the basic component is the academic, vocabulary (Hyland, 2007). Keeping balance between fluency and connectedness in a text is a real challenge for second language learners as they are required to produce a piece of writing which is not only fluent but also coherent and comprehensive at the same time (Nunan, 1999). Students' background knowledge and writing practices is also another hurdle in the way of successful AW. For example, Lebowitz (2000) mentions that one of the challenges faced by students is the pattern of AW which is different from the non-academic discourse they used in secondary schooling. Students tend to employ some of the elements and patterns of non-AW discourse when they write at university level without considering how it can affect quality of their written work. Since selection of accurate words is inevitable for success in academic projects, choosing correct vocabulary for an academic discourse is not an easy task for students. For example, Corson (1997) seems to describe academic vocabulary as an important component of academic language, which is a critical phenomenon for students in schools and universities for their academic success. Use of academic vocabulary is a complex task; even ESL writers who have finished their doctoral degrees seem to face problems with vocabulary in scholarly writing. For example, Buckingham (2008) in his research interviewed 13 Turkish scholars regarding correct use of words in their AW projects. The study applied a mixed method approach. The study reported that they needed more time finding the right words and they also struggled with the precision of words (p.6). Expressing others' ideas in one's own words can be a problem for many of the students as majority may not be able to find it an easy task. According to Amin and Alamin (2012), the biggest issue that students face in AW process is paraphrasing. A number of students seem reluctant to write others' work in their own words as it usually leads to grammatical and organizational mistakes. Rose (1985) argues that students who are non-native speakers of English often seem to experience issues with grammar, lexis and syntax while engaged in AW tasks. The situation is further aggravated when faced with the challenges of the rhetoric of AE such as "way of organizing ideas, defending claims, and addressing readers (Belcher, 1994)".

Carlson (1987) believes that writer's credibility can be conveyed through certain rhetorical strategies and majority of students do not seem able to apply these strategies successfully. She also notes that use of vague words can diminish writer's credibility in AW. Since success of AW hinges upon the correct choice of words, vocabulary plays a vital role in shaping an excellent academic discourse. Chou (2005) and Fan (2000) conducted a research on general English vocabulary size of first-year university students in Hong Kong. Findings of their research reveal that total amount of words students learn is 3000 which is insufficient to achieve good results in an English medium university. The situation is further aggravated when students are required to adopt academic language as they do not have a considerable amount of vocabulary. It is referred as a lexical bar that needs to be crossed if students want to express their ideas adequately in AW (Corson, 1995).

While discussing common issues of AW in Pakistan, Haider (2012) notes that teachers in Pakistan do not seem to pay attention towards the AW skills of students which eventually lead them to the failure in gaining excellence in their writing. AW in English at university level is relatively different from writing at lower levels of education as the vocabulary knowledge, grammar skills and the way of organizing ideas are different at the two levels (Feak & Swales, 2004).

AW demands are relatively complex and high at university level as students seem to pursue their

future research projects on higher levels. (Gasper & Shepherd, 2009). Since excellent AW ability at postgraduate and graduate levels is one of the precondition to produce quality research work in the universities of Pakistan, its importance at higher education level becomes more vital. In the Pakistani higher education context, Sajid and Siddique (2015) argue that writing in appropriate academic way is one of the major problems faced by most university students.

3. Research Methodology

Methodology in general, aims to investigate a research problem by using various techniques, procedures and tools. Since methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem its importance in research is vital. This chapter provides information regarding research methodology applied to this study such as research design sample of the research and information about data collection instruments and data analysis techniques.

3.1 Research Design

Research is about defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis; collection, Organization and evaluation of data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and finally testing conclusions carefully to ensure it fits to the formulated hypothesis. Design on other hand is mainly concerned with “aims, uses, purposes, intentions and plans within the practical constraint of location, time and money” (Hakim, 2000, p.1). The present study has used a mixed method approach to investigate and explain AW issues on M.Phil level of a sample of hundred male and female students. I have applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data of this study. However, collection and analysis of data were done thorough separate typical quantitative and qualitative ways. SPSS (versopn19) used to analyze quantitative data and qualitative data was analyzed through thematic coding method. Rational behind using mixed methodology for this research study is that it provides a better understanding of research problems.

3.2 The Selection of the sample

Since this study aims to explore AW issues of M.Phil students, the target population to collect data consists of 50 MPhil level students from English department in a private university of Gujranwala, Pakistan. Due to limited availability of resources, participants were only chosen from one private University.

3.3 Details about participants

All of the participants chosen for this study were from third and four semesters of M.Phil degrees. Fifty participants including females and males from M.Phil programs participated in the survey with their consent. Questionnaires were distributed among participants in researcher’s presence to ensure the reliability of collected data.

3.4 Interviews participants

The interviews with five English instructors were conducted with their consent. Due to availability of limited faculty on the campus and considerable qualitative data inclusion in the questionnaire, only five semi- structured interviews were conducted for this study. Participants were the highly professional teachers in the university who had also taught AW course in various institutions. Participation of Interviewees in this study was entirely voluntarily. Interviewees’ recommendations were also taken in consideration to minimize AW issues.

3.5 Sample of the Study

Since this study aims to explore AW issues of M.Phil all of the Participants chosen for this study were from third and four semesters. Since university started offering AW course recently, it was expected that participates in the survey have basic idea of AW and its important components along with its significance in academic writing. Seventy questionnaires were distributed among students in one private university. Researcher received response from 50 students who participated in this research study voluntarily. The age of participants was between twenty eight and thirty-five. The demographic details added to the questionnaire were based on participants’ gender, education level and age. Thirty-five females and fifteen males from M.Phil programs participated in this survey with their consent.

Reason for small number of male participants contributing than their female counterparts is the large number of female students enrolled in M.Phil English programs in the university. Questionnaires were distributed among participants in researcher's presence to ensure reliability of collected data. Survey was conducted during regular class sessions with the permission of university authorities and class instructors.

3.6 *Instruments*

3.6.1 *Questionnaires*

A questionnaire consists of two parts, including qualitative and quantitative data was designed for this research study. Students were asked their demographic information such as their age, gender and degree level in the very beginning of the questionnaire. However, First part of the questionnaire was quantitative and includes 20 polar (Yes/No) items. Second part of the questionnaire was also qualitative in which a long passage from a research article was provided to students. Researcher clearly defined the task. Students were asks to summarize the given text by applying all the necessary principles of AW. Questionnaire was only designed in printed form Reason to develop a printed questionnaire like this has numerous advantages. First, it is considered a conventional and most accepted way to collect intended data; secondly, it shows higher response rate than digital surveys (Nulty, 2008). One of the primary advantages of paper surveys is that respondents seem comparatively honest than their digital counterparts.

3.6.2 *Interviews*

Although questionnaires provided considerable information about the concerned issue of the study, interviews with the professionals helped me to broaden my understanding regarding AW and possible reason of issues student face when write academically. Since interviews are considered one of the significant tools for collecting primary data, their role in research is vital (Myers, 1997). Due to individual concerns of the interviewees interviews were not recorded. Interviews were noted by the researcher in written form. A thematic coding method was used to analyze data obtained by interviews. Since this study used semi-structured interviews few questions were already written and organized by researcher, though some of the questions were emerged during interviews. All interviewees were asked the same questions with same sequence and then interviewees were given an opportunity to share their opinions. Questions formulated by researcher to ask interviewees were; what are their perceptions on AW, second question was about the issues that these professionals observe students face in their writing, third question was regarding possible reasons of these issues in students' writing and fourth question was about their suggestions to overcome these issues as academics. Thus, semi-structured interviews allowed researcher to get insight into perceptions, views and opinions of the teachers on the numerous challenges of students face in AW. Teachers also shared the possible solutions to minimize these issues. To ensure levels of comfort and privacy of the participants Interviews were conducted in a separate room with the permission of department coordinator .All participants were from English department and their participation for interviews was entirely voluntary.

3.7 *Procedures of Data Analysis*

To analyze quantitative data SPSS (version19) was used. SPSS is given a significant importance to both quantitative a qualitative data. About 85% researchers believe that they can carry quantitative data for further analysis and SPSS is preferred in this regard because of its efficiency to evaluate even large evaluate data. A thematic- coding method was used to analyze qualitative data. Since thematic - coding method helps focusing most emerged themes in the collected data, its importance to evaluate qualitative findings is vital. Thematic analysis helps researchers to identify implicit and explicit ideas. In thematic coding method, coding is what helps researchers to develop themes within the raw data. Theme on other hand represents response and meaning from the data that is related to the research questions. For present study data is analyzed by using thematic coding method at both semantic and

latent levels, to get a deeper understanding of explicit ideas and implicit underlying assumptions and patterns.

4. Discussion

Findings of the Study

Table 4.1

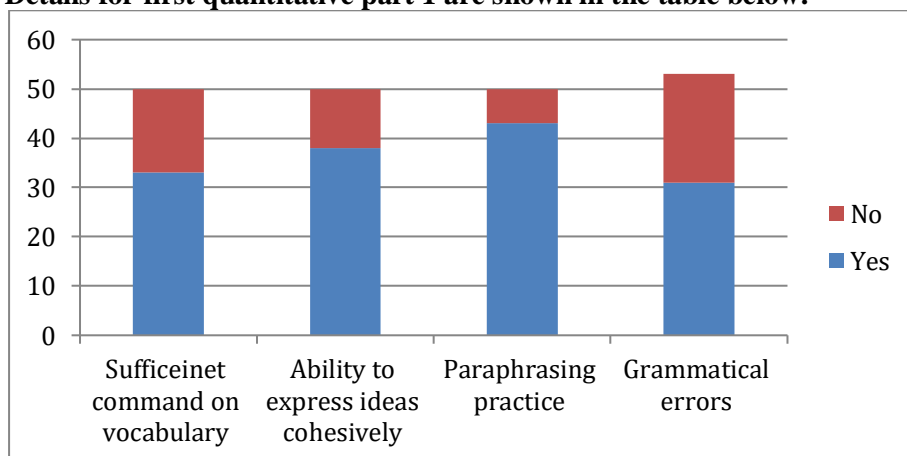
Demographical details of the Participants

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Male</i>	15	15
<i>Female</i>	35	35
<i>Total</i>	50	50

4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

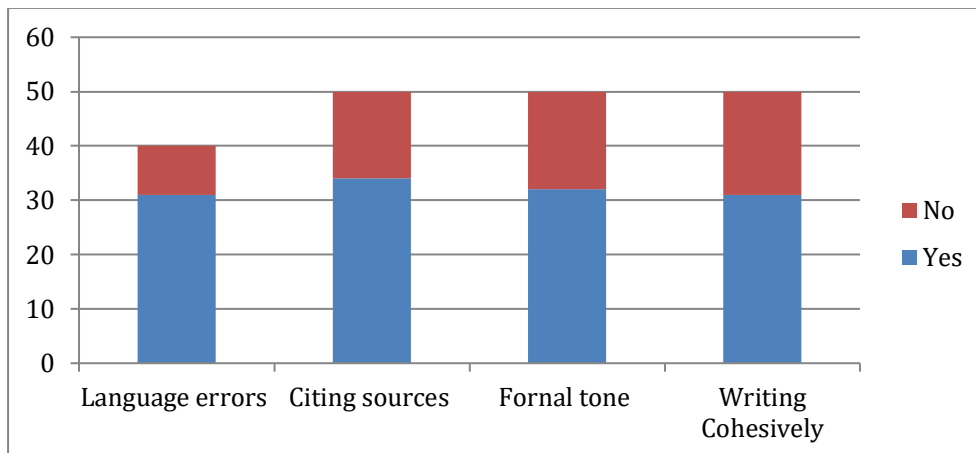
As regard to the first quantitative part of the questionnaire consist of one part. First part was close-ended based on twenty polar (Yes/No) questions in the second part of the questionnaire student were asked to summarize a passage which was taken from academic research article. The analysis of the first part was executed by counting all the responses by the researcher and then a cross-check was done with the help of a colleague. Since tables are considered an effective way to present research findings for clear understanding responses were counted and formed by using tables. It is believed by number of researchers that tables and graphs are convenient way to present data in an effectively as they help to present and also clarify important information.

Details for first quantitative part 1 are shown in the table below:



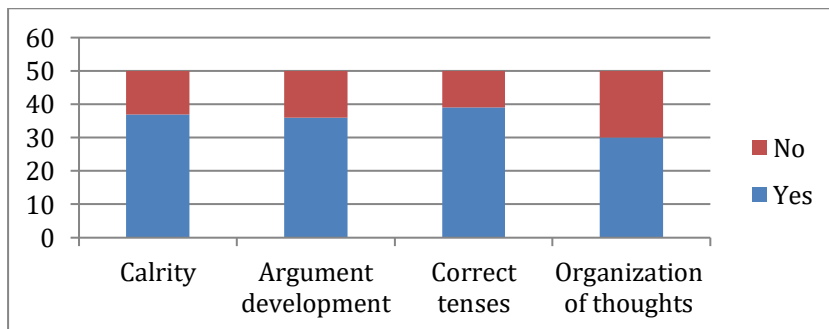
Results from the first quantitative part reveal that students have considerably good understanding of academic writing and follow its rules and conventions. Out of fifty thirty three participants claim to have adequate command on vocabulary. Thirty eight participants believe to have ability to express their ideas in writing without any major difficulties. Forty three percent students claimed they can paraphrase ideas and thirty one percent students said yes to the statement when they were asked if they commit grammatical mistakes in their writing.

Figure 2 shows details of the academic writing components



As figure 2 shows thirty two students said yes to the statement when they were asked if they commit language errors in their writing. Thirty four participants said yes when they were asked if they quote academic sources in their academic assignments. Thirty two participants believe their writing has a formal tone. Thirty one participants said yes when they were asked if they can write cohesively.

Figure 3 shows details about use of academic writing components



Thirty seven students said yes when they were asked if their writing is equipped with clarity. Thirty six students said agreed that they practice argument development in their writing. Thirty nine students claimed using correct tenses and thirty students said yes when they were asked if they can organize thoughts in their writing.

4.2 Analysis of the qualitative part of the questionnaire

4.2.1 Organizational Issues

Among fifty participants, eight participants skipped the question while 42 participants answered the question. Among 42 participants only 8 participants could write in formal style however, their writing lack organization and structure, while majority of participants could not paraphrase the passage in their own words, sentence structure was disrupted number of times, there was no paragraph scheme, and appropriate conclusion was also skipped. A number of participants wrote vague sentences with no linguistic sense, over all structure of their writing was neither united nor organized. However, among fifteen male participants, three skipped this question, majority of the participants do not seem able to paraphrase the passage, their writing lack unity and organization, there was no sequence found in their ideas.

Among 50 participants 21 could not write cohesively.

Following sentences show organization issues in students' writing. "English language is very important when we use the word, sentences, what right word uses", this sentence neither has any linguistic sense nor any organized thought. "English is liked by us a lot in the all of the world", again this sentence does not convey any clear meaning. "English is very much must thing and people should learn", this sentence not only includes unnecessary repetitions of words it also does not convey any clear meaning as well. "Motivation language in other context besides through recent works can more easily overlook the imperialist associations of English", this sentence again does not clear the meaning or idea student wants to convey. "Motivated language learners show high level of international posture", this sentence does not make any sense. "Yes there is need to bring up the young generation together the English language as well as the other community issue of medium of infrastructure". This sentence seems complex and does not convey a clear idea. Few more examples are as the following sentence: "Even though may 'Japanaes' learners wish to interact with native speakers". This student not only wrote wrong spelling of Japanese but also wrote sentence in wrong structure by using "may" prior Japanese while it was supposed to be written after "learners". A number of students wrote sentences such as: "Many writers say that English can play a great role in the progress of this language". It can be noticed that this sentence is not conveying any clear meaning. "English may be powerful vehicles for promoting dialogues, unity and reduction between developed and undeveloped area". The first mistake in this sentence is grammatical as using "vehicles" instead using "vehicle". And it can be noticed that student used word "reduction" with no rational as it does not make any clear sense in the sentence. "English language has been become a source of communication". This sentence lack grammatical cohesion thus does not seem to convey a clear meaning. "It has been become a trend to learn English". This sentence seems to have same issue as it lacks linguistic sense. Younger generation can more it easily overlook", sentence sequence seem disturbed as student should have written this as "Younger generation can overlook it more easily". All of the examples above are taken from students' writing and they clearly show lack of cohesion and coherence.

4.2.1 Grammatical Issues

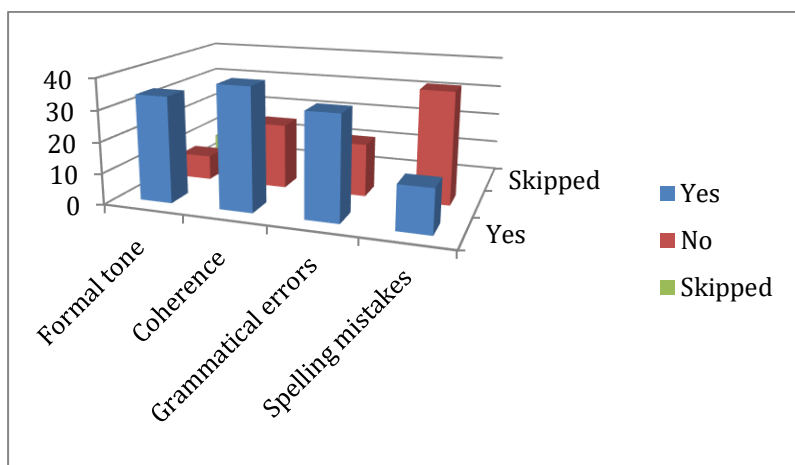
There were number of grammatical mistakes found in their writing such as, wrong capitalization, wrong use of preposition, incorrect use of articles, missing punctuation such as apostrophes, period, commas, colons and quotation marks. Excessive use of contractions such as "shouldn't" "didn't" and "can't" seem common in their writing. Some of the participants did tense mistakes while other wrote wrong spellings such as "competance" instead of writing "competence", "Specialy" instead of writing "specially" and, "incourage" instead of writing "encourage", "inhancement" instead of "enhancement", "basicaly" instead of "basically", "apportunities" instead of "opportunities", "espects" instead of "aspects", Some of the participants seem to commit tense mistakes e.g. one female participant wrote "It have been became" while another female wrote "Motivation among students play vital role" instead of "plays" and " Younger generation overlook" instead of writing "overlooks". "They are talking about motivation openly and also telling that language complex learning". This student omitted "is" in the sentence and additionally, used informal expression such a words "openly" and talking", ", didn't", " won't" etc. "English may be powerful vehicles for promoting dialogues, unity and reduction between developed and undeveloped area". The mistake in this sentence is grammatical such as use of "vehicles" instead of using "vehicle". Students also did tenses mistakes. A student wrote "That they should must have" instead of writing "They must have". Another student wrote "It have been become" instead of writing "It has become". "Motivation play major role", instead of writing, "Motivation plays a major role". Another student wrote, "And they don't want to be identify" instead of writing "they do not want to be identified". "Japanese were wanted to interact" instead of writing "Japanese wanted to interact". "Younger generation can gave" instead of writing "Younger generation can give". "Younger generation can overlook" instead of "Younger generation overlooks". "English language also play a big role" instead of writing "English language also plays a big role". Some people feels hesitated". Instead of writing "Some people feel hesitated". "It believe that English will be more powerful vehicle" instead of writing "it is believed or believes". "Many examples shows" instead of

writing “many examples show”. Since it was introduced” instead of writing “since it was introduced”. “It is believe” instead of writing “it is believed”.

4.2.2 Use of Informal Language

A number of students used informal style of language such as excessive use of word “very much”, “so much”, “big”, “a lot”, “talking”, “openly”, “is not a joke” etc. Students seem to use informal words such as, “some people say”, “never ever”, “lot of”, “a little bit”, “I guess”, very good, if we talk, everyman, every person, bitter, got etc. some of the students wrote sentences such as, English is very very basic language”, this student used a repetitive word “very very” which is an informal expression. Student might have written it as “English is an important/significant language”. Moreover, a male student while enlisting issues he faces in AW regarding vocabulary and formal language particularly mentioned that he finds AW difficult than any other types of writing, he wrote: “I always find AW different and challenging than any other form of writing”.

Figure 4 shows results of the qualitative part of the questionnaire



4.3 Findings from Semi-Structured interviews

Apart from the qualitative data gained from the questionnaire further qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Due to personal concerns of interviewees’ interviews were not recorded and they were noted by the researcher in written form. Interviews were conducted with five highly qualified teachers in the campus to know their perception of AW along with the issues they believe students face and possible solutions to cope with these issues. A thematic coding method was implied to analyze qualitative data collected through interviews. The thematic categories are found quite relevant to the issues students face while writing academically.

Following themes were emerged from data collected by semi-structured interviews:

4.3.1 Formality in Academic Writing

It is found that teachers’ perceptions of AW are that they believe that this is a distinctive type of writing. For example, Interviewees commented: (A) “Definitely AW is all different in its tone; it uses formal and refined language”. (B) “AW in my opinion is all about argumentation, persuasion and formality”. “(C) AW is when you do not use informal language such as slangs and SMS language, it is all about formality”. “(D) AW is about formality, objectivity, referencing, citing, proper conclusions and lot more”. “(E) AW I think is a kind of writing we relate to scholarly writing and a writing that makes you to be identified as a scholar”.

4.3.2 Insufficient Vocabulary

Concerning issues faced by students in their writing all interviewees discussed a number of issues students face in their writing. According to the interviewees, the most common issues students face in their AW is shortage of vocabulary. For example, Interviewees commented: (A) “Students do not have

sufficient vocabulary to convey their ideas in their writing”. (C) “They run out words it seems they cannot replace words when they are given passages to paraphrase”. (E) “Poor reading habits do not let students to be lexically versatile and in their assignments most of the times they do not seem to use proper lexical expressions”.

4.3.3 *Incorrect use of Mechanics*

The third most emerged theme from the discussion from interviewees is the wrong use of mechanics. For example, Interviewee (C) commented “When we teach our students the use of mechanics they find it boring and usually underestimate it by saying it is a small thing to learn but when we check their assignments the most common errors are found related to punctuation”. Interviewee (D) commented “students have no idea where to start and where to end a sentence, where to take a break where to continue, students can even forget putting full stops I wonder”. Interviewee (E) said “If students will realize how a simple comma can actually change the whole meaning they will not misuse it anymore”.

4.3.4 *Topic Sentence*

The fourth major theme while concerning issues in AW emerged from interviews is knowledge of topic sentence. Interviewee (B) said, “Students have no idea what a topic sentence means and how to follow it when they write”. Interviewee (C) said, “Topic sentence and thesis statement is biggest issues students seem to face as they can hardly differentiate between two”. Interviewee (D) commented, “To meet the expectations of the paragraph scheme and cohesion standards topic sentence knowledge is crucial which majority of students seem to lack”.

4.3.5 *Use of Informal Language*

Use of texting language is another major issue is found in students’ writing as Interviewee (C) said, “An excessive use of texts in daily life has affected badly our students’ habits of writing as they write words such as, f9 for fine, m for am, mrng for Morning and so on”. Interviewee (C) said, Use of text speaking language is a major issues found these days in the writing of our students they use informal and shortened forms of the words”. Interviewee (E) commented, “Use of SMS language in academic assignments is a biggest drawback, students use SMS language without realizing how badly it might affect their grades and quality of their writing”. Another major issue is literal word to word translation of ideas from L1 to L2, while commenting on this Interviewee (D) said, “While writing students do not seem to convey write meaning of the words, in my opinion they have no idea that a single word can carry several connotations he added”. Interviewee (D) said, “Translating ideas by applying L1 formula to L2 is a common practice, he further added, students try to translate ideas in L2 by applying literal meaning of a word from L1 that ends up confusing teachers most of the times”.

4.4 *Organization Issues*

Cohesion and coherence issue is also a major theme from all interviews. For example, Interviewee (A) said, “Students cannot write in a tightly connected structure”. Interviewee (C) commented, “I find students do not link paragraphs appropriately, they will leave an idea on the way and will start writing another one anywhere”. Interviewee (D) commented, Students cannot link thoughts and ideas and their writing lack cohesion most of the times”.

4.5 *Subject Verb Agreement*

Subject verb agreement issue is another major theme emerged from the discussion with interviewees. For example, Interviewee (B) commented, “While facing certain grammatical issues in writing students the most common problem students seem to face is subject verb agreement”. Interviewee (C) commented, “Off course subject verb agreement is the most common issues in students’ writing and they repeat it so often”. Interviewee (D) said, “Students mostly write irregular sentences with wrong noun and verb agreement”.

4.6 *Causes of Issues in Students’ Academic Writing*

There are number of factors included to the possible causes of AW deficiencies among students such as; Rote memorizing, lack of academic training and faulty education system. Concerning rote memorizing as a crucial factor responsible for faulty AW interviewee (A) commented “students are not taught to reproduce knowledge from the beginning but they are told to memorize only to pass the exam thus, their writing reflect that rote memorizing later at higher education level and also lacks their original contribution” Interviewee (B) commented “Students are not taught to build arguments or analyze things, they are only taught how to cram that ultimately affects their writing skills”. Based on

the thematic coding analyses the second reason emerged from interviews is lack of training. According to interviewees lack of training for both teachers and students is a primary reason that hinders students to write professionally. Interviewee (C) commented “Students are not trained enough to write productively from the very beginning of their academic careers”. Interviewee (E) said:

“Writing is an essential task that must entail a purpose and unfortunately our students are not trained professionally to know the purpose of their writing and important factor such as their target audience”. Interviewee (D) said “Whatever is the reason but our students are not well trained to write academically, their writing lacks that formality that AW must have”.

Interviewee (C) said “Students are not given sufficient research material to evaluate which is the best training for them to know how to write professionally and in a particular research style”. Faulty education system is another basic theme emerged from the whole discussion with the interviewees, as they believe education system is another primary reason that hampers our students to write professionally. For example, Interviewee (A) commented “Our education system promotes rote memorizing and thus critical thinking factor is overlooked”. Interviewee (C) commented “We need certain modifications in curriculum by adding

Mandatory writing courses for students at various levels”. Interviewee (E) said “Our examination system encourages to cram not to re-phrase things which is the primary reason our students seem fail to write academically even at M.Phil level”. (a) Suggestions to Minimize Academic Writing Issues Teachers’ comments concerning minimize these issues in AW are also analyzed by using thematic coding method.

4.7 Suggestions to Improve Students’ Academic Writing

Common themes from recommendations emerged among all five interviewees are:

4.7.1 Proper training of students

Interviewee (A) suggested, “To produce better researchers we need best research training programs”. Interviewee (B) recommended, “We should train students by assigning them various research writing tasks”. Interviewee (D) suggested, “There must be some training programs for students to provide them information about research writing and its components such as, designing draft, paraphrasing, formatting, referencing and citations etc.

4.7.2 Improved education and examination system

Another prevalent theme emerged from interviews as suggestion is the improved examination system. Interviewee (A) suggested, “Our examination system needs to be revised so that it could check not the memorizing capacity of the students only but their critical thinking capacity too”. Interviewee (C) recommended, “Our education and examination system need to be improved to produce better researchers and writers”. Interviewee (D) proposed his views regarding this “Faulty education system is definitely is one of the major reason to discourage good writing, we need to form an examination system that should inspire students to paraphrase ideas than to write them in rote memorizing”. Interviewee (D) suggested, Government must look into this matter and try to form policies that will persuade students towards productive writing”.

4.7.3 Socio-cultural factors

Interviewee (A) commented “majority of students come from poor academic and social backgrounds such as so called private schools did not prepare them to write up to the mark”. Interviewee (C) said “The environment a student grows up, the institution he goes to matters a lot to be a good writer”. Interviewee (D) said “I observed during my whole teaching career that students who come from rural areas and whose parents are not educated they seem to suffer more than the urban students”.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that students have general understanding of the essential components of Aw such as, paraphrasing, editing, and synthesizing, cohesion and coherence, appropriate conclusion, appropriate ideas, vocabulary, unity, clarity, accurate grammar, significance, revision, reviewing, citations, preciseness, structured ideas, formality of language as important part of academic writing. The qualitative part of the questionnaire also shows that students have basic knowledge about AW and its components. Study also revealed while applying conventions of academic writing students faced difficulties particularly, choosing appropriate word expressions, grammatical understanding, and proper organization of ideas and using a formal tone. A similar study was conducted by [Yahiya and](#)

Hashim (2013) on writing difficulties among Postgraduate students at University Sains, Malaysia, and sample was fifteen students. A qualitative method was applied to this study and data was collected through open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of two open-ended items regarding writing difficulties faced by students and how to improve the writing difficulties. The data was analyzed in a descriptive form. The findings reveal that students faced difficulties such as comprehension and conception of ideas, composition, language accuracy and appropriate vocabulary since choice of words has a direct influence upon the accuracy and quality of any piece of writing. Writing academically could be very challenging for students because in AW students are not merely required to compose but to think and analyze things critically (Myles, 2002). Outcomes of this study show factors such as social and cultural backgrounds, malpractice of examination system, and lack of training make students suffer in their academic careers.

5.1 Implications to Further Studies

- This study was conducted in one university further studies may consider broaden the scope of their research.
- Further studies might also broaden the sample of the study.
- Studies related to the socio-cultural backgrounds of students and their impact on students' writing may also be conducted.
- A gender based study on the similar topic can be carried out.
- This study used a mixed method approach; further studies may consider collecting data by applying either quantitative method to obtain more accurate results or a thorough qualitative method to obtain more in depth overview of the issue.

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