



IMAM KHOMEINI  
INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Printed ISSN: 2676-5587  
Online ISSN: 2676-5985

# Transcendental Phenomenology Into the Lived Experiences of Iranian EFL Teachers and Students in FL Academic Writing

Fateme Bahrami<sup>1</sup>, Rajab Esfandiari<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MA in English Language Teaching, Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran

*fatemebahrami1997@yahoo.com*

<sup>2\*</sup>(Corresponding author), Professor of English Language Teaching, Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran *esfandiari@hum.ikiu.ac.ir*

---

## Article info Abstract

Article type:  
Research article

Received:  
2026/04/14

Accepted:  
2026/05/27

Prior research in foreign language (FL) academic writing in tertiary education has been promising, but the extent to which the lived experiences of English-as-foreign-language (EFL) teachers and students may play a role identifying areas which may contribute to the development of such writing remains limited. This qualitative study was aimed at exploring Iranian EFL teachers' and students' lived experiences for better understanding the factors, challenges, and solutions which may possibly result in improving university academic writing. To that end, six language teachers and 18 students (six BA, six MA, and six PhD) participated in semi-structured interviews for data collection purposes. The researchers used transcendental phenomenology as the research design to frame the study, drew on interviews to collect the data, and followed inductive thematic analysis to analyse the interview data. The results showed the following major themes: The challenges, factors, solutions, and nature of academic writing as a distinct genre. The paper ends with the conclusion that effective EFL academic writing may benefit from incorporating a balanced treatment of top-down policies at institutional levels and bottom-up strategies followed by EFL learners. The implications of the findings for teacher education programs and curriculum development are discussed.

**Keywords:** academic standards, academic writing, institutional policy, lived experiences

---

Cite this article: Bahrami, F. & Esfandiari, R. (2026). Transcendental phenomenology into the lived experiences of Iranian EFL teachers and students in FL academic writing. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, 13(3), 173-193.

DOI: [10.30479/jmrels.2026.23580.2616](https://doi.org/10.30479/jmrels.2026.23580.2616)

©2026 by the authors. Published by Imam Khomeini International University.

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0)) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



## 1. Introduction

Writing is an inevitable, momentous part of an educational setting. Teachers' cognition of students' knowledge regarding the academic standards of writing can also determine and establish a framework for the next steps of teaching (Zhang, 2022). As a result, teachers will be able to monitor students' achievements in a writing course more precisely and apply the required academic standards and strategies in a way that instructors can decide whether language learners have achieved the competence of writing academically. In a study done by Phothongsunan (2023), it was concluded that "learner-directed feedback is a useful tool for developing and supplementing learners' writing and academic skills and highlight compelling rationale for adopting learner-directed feedback in academic writing courses" (p. 229). Zhang et al. (2023) also concluded that "though students' initial affective engagement towards peer feedback was not very favorable, their accumulated experience with giving feedback transformed them into engaging in higher engagement with peer feedback in this learning environment" (p. 10).

However, there are some dilemmas in the process of developing students' writing, relating to institutional policies and academic standards. First of all, students may come from different educational backgrounds so that not all students can improve their academic writing at the same time (Taheri et al., 2025). Second, the materials which teachers utilize as the source of academic writing may vary among the teachers (Al-Jaryan et al., 2026). Lastly, the language educators who teach academic writing may lack the sufficient expertise in academic writing (Domínguez Jeria et al., 2025). Needless to say, this situation makes the process of developing academic writing difficult for students as they have to rely more on their own rather than on writing classes. In the present study, the researchers explored Iranian EFL teachers' and students' experiences to shed light on what contributes to improved academic writing in tertiary education. To fill this gap, we formulated the following research question:

How do EFL teachers and students experience and make sense of students' improvement in academic writing?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Institutional Policies and Their Effect on Students' Writing

Institutional curricula pertaining to writing play a significant role in the development of students' academic writing. In recent years, a growing number of publications have focused on writing which is often considered a challenge and sometimes an obligatory dimension of academic life (Akkaya & Aydin, 2018), and which is also widely regarded as one of the most problematic tasks (Celik, 2020). Celik, for example, stressed the role played

by any of the problems faced by students when they tried to communicate complex ideas in a language other than their mother tongue. As Celik argued, academic writing is a critical aspect of any program in which the majority of graduate-level students do not have the adequate writing skills.

Writing can be the major focus in academic settings. In some studies, academic writing is regarded as a major learning outcome from university studies. Akkaya and Aydin (2018) have also defined academic writing in terms of the process of sharing original research with other scholars based on standard rules. Writing has to be the focus of educational settings so that students will better understand its significant role in academic literacy. In fact, academic writing per se is a tool for helping students to develop their academic literacy through a thorough curriculum.

Devising an institutional policy does not per se lead to the development of academic writing. Among the most crucial characteristics of academic writing, one can refer to searching for, finding, and evaluating information through mental processes and interpretation and reconstruction (Akkaya & Aydin, 2018). Teachers cannot claim that as soon as they adopt a policy pertaining to academic writing, they can pave the way for students to achieve the optimal level of academic writing. In fact, policy makers design approaches to answer an issue on the policy agenda. More specifically, the nature of a policy solution as well as the way it is formulated can influence “the enactment of a policy” (Bell & Stevenson, 2015). There is some evidence to suggest that standards may, or may not, emphasize particular instructional practices that positively impact student writing. Furthermore, the changing of standards may not always prove useful in some cases. Troia et al. (2015), for example, claimed that, sometimes, improvement to learning standards in the realm of writing would not lead to a better student writing outcome.

## **2.2. Development of Students’ Writing Based on Academic Standards**

Most researchers have devoted a certain amount of space and time to the investigation of strategies and policies governing the development of students’ writing. It has been reported that writing, as an essential part of learning in the academia, has been a demanding task for students (McNamara & Allen, 2018). Consequently, instructing students to plan effective writing strategies and applying the knowledge of effective instruction play a key role for both educators and learners. Some scholars have compared the perspectives of teachers and students in improving academic writing. For example, Yang (2023) explored students’ practices about their supervisors’ feedback on their academic writing. The analysis revealed that the supervisor-student dyads had a shared goal of paper writing in cognitive skills but different goals of paper writing in academic discourse.

In the process of teaching academic writing, teachers may exploit various strategies based on the overall needs of students' needs. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that strategy instruction is one of the most successful forms of writing instruction (Crossley & McNamara, 2017). In line with previous studies, teachers may also prioritize performance-based instruction. Many teachers, especially in western countries, are moving away from theory-driven methods to performance-based approaches (Darling-Hammond, 2016). It has been previously observed that being aware of learners' difficulties can aid teachers to more efficiently facilitate the process of learning for students. To begin with, Celik (2020) claimed that even experienced graduate students sometimes lack the critical writing skills that educators need to pay attention to. Teachers, however, are often concerned with exposing students to suitable materials. They try to push students to produce sentences in the target language while helping them to reduce their errors (Moradkhani & Rahimi, 2019). Last, but not least, teachers may apply various tools to improve students' ability in writing (Maamuujav et al., 2019). For example, teachers may utilize graphic organizers, because they can play an eminent role in scaffolding the development of writing.

### **2.3. Studies on Improvement of Academic Writing**

Textbook writers have recommended numerous guidelines to assist in the development of students' writing. In a study conducted by Celik (2020), an action research project was developed to gain a better understanding of the impact of process writing on students in terms of both their perception of themselves as writers and their confidence in their writing ability. The results showed a positive impact on the achievement of students in terms of their improvement in academic writing. The project was mainly framed as a process writing assignment in order to scaffold the development of the participants' writing skills. According to the results, process writing was an effective means for developing students' writing ability. Yung and Cia (2019) also conducted a study in which they investigated the teaching project for improving the criterion ability of students in academic writing through concept-based instruction. The findings showed that students could be grouped into four classes of academic writing. The results also revealed that students with high English proficiency did not necessarily do well in all aspects of academic writing.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of language proficiency of students in the process of improving academic writing. Lee and Deakin (2016) conducted a study and compared interactional meta-discourse in successful and less successful Chinese ESL (English as a second language) university students' and more proficient L1 English university students' argumentative essays. In their study, they selected L1 student

writing instead of expert writing as they believed L1 students' writing "represent more realistically appropriate targets than published research article" (p. 23). The findings revealed that successful L1 and L2 essays contained more instances of hedging devices in comparison with less successful essays. Another important finding was that ESL students, unlike L1 learners, seldom established an authorial identity in their writing.

Researchers have also examined EFL learners' and teachers' experiences regarding L2 writing. These studies have analyzed the experiences, following varied methodologies, diverse contexts, and different sample sizes. For example, Derakhshan and Karimi Shirejini (2020) examined Iranian EFL students' perceptions and experiences of the most common writing problems. The analyses of their experiences showed grammar, pronunciation, spelling, paragraph coherence, organization, words, and rhetorical structures to be the sources of writing problems. Similarly, Esfandiari et al. (2022) explored Iranian EFL postgraduate students' experiences and expectations to identify their writing needs. The researchers followed qualitative dynamic narrative inquiry to better understand the dynamics of postgraduate writing. The analysis of narrative data pointed to two interesting findings: The students' challenges in writing were primarily because of insufficient instruction they received in their writing courses, and the EFL learners' expectations were not necessarily consistent with their actual practices.

More recently, Sun et al. (2024) used structural equation modelling to investigate Chinese EFL learners' metacognitive experiences and their writing development. Results from the study showed that the learners' involvement in writing, their motivation to learn to write, and the effect of instruction on their writing were closely related to the development of their writing. Most recently, Anjarani et al. (2026) thematically analysed Indonesian pre-service teachers' experiences of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in their writing as student teachers and future educators and found that although AI tools helped them to generate ideas, organize their writing, improve accuracy in writing, and increase their writing efficiency, overreliance on these technologies might negatively affect creativity in their writing.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Participants**

Two groups of participants took part in the present study: English language teachers and EFL students. Six language teachers also participated in the present study. They all were native speakers of Farsi. All the English teachers were male except for one of them, and all of them had experienced teaching English between two and 10 years. They

taught academic writing at various universities and were experienced enough to participate in this study. All the English teachers held PhD degrees in teaching English except for one of the teachers who had PhD in Linguistics. They all had sophisticated knowledge to explain and answer the interview questions based on their experiences in teaching academic writing.

Students were divided into three groups: Six BA students, six MA, and six PhD students. All six BA students were native speakers of Persian. They all were female and majored either in English language teaching or English Translation. All six BA students had experienced participating in academic writing classes, and some of them also had the experience of taking part in academic writing classes of IELTS (international English language testing system). Six MA and six PhD students also took part in the study. All MA students were female and had graduated or were still studying English Teaching in one of the Iranian universities. They had the experience of having academic writing courses in both BA and MA. They all were native speakers of Persian. The six students who were studying PhD in English Language Teaching were also native speakers of Persian. Half of the PhD students were male and half of them were female.

This study employed purposive criterion sampling. This type of sampling is one of the most common type of sampling in L2 qualitative research, and it is often utilized when participants possess certain key characteristics that are related to the purpose of the investigation. In other words, criterion sampling means picking cases that have special criteria (Creswell & Poth 2018).

This type of sampling was useful for quality assurance, and we used the following criteria to select them. The BA, MA, and PhD students all had to be EFL students majoring in language teaching in university settings in Iran to help us to better understand their experiences in language than content areas. Secondly, they must have passed at least one writing course to be able to express their experiences, concerns, and factors possibly affecting their writing. Thirdly, we selected both male and female students to represent the larger student populations and to help us to present a more balanced view of their points. Lastly, the language teachers had to be PhD holders, have teaching experience in university settings, and have the experience of teaching at least one writing course in universities.

To ensure the data for the present study were sufficient to contribute to thick description, the researchers followed the principles of data saturation (Ary et al., 2014). Initially, the number of the participants for the study was far larger than those mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The lead researcher began collecting data until she realized

the data did not provide any new information after the sixth participant, so we decided to focus on the analysis of data collected from the first six language teachers and the first six BA, MA, and PhD students.

### **3.2. Instrumentation**

The instruments that were utilized in the present study encompass three semi-structured interviews: Interview with English Language teachers, interview with BA students, and interview with MA and PhD students. Applying a qualitative approach to explore the impacts of institutional policy and academic standards on the improvement of students' writing, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with BA students, MA and PhD students, and English language teachers separately. The reason why the researchers conducted interviews with both teachers and MA, BA, and PhD students was that qualitative data drawn from the interviews with the two groups of participants can more appropriately shed light on the issues that the students themselves cannot understand while adding an additional perspective on their experiences (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

First, the researchers developed an interview with Language teachers. The semi-structured interview with the teachers was developed in the following way. In order to find the most appropriate questions to fit for the purpose of the present study, the researchers started to study the relevant literature. By doing so, they found a set of appropriate questions in line with the purpose of the present study. The researchers, then, selected the most relevant items to the purpose of institutional policies and academic standards. Finally, the researchers selected 11 items as the interview questions for English teachers with the help of an expert.

After developing the interview for English teachers, the researchers examined the related literature for the second time to find appropriate questions for the semi-structure interviews with the BA students. The researchers found relevant questions for the purpose of this study. Initially, more than 20 questions were considered appropriate for BA students. However, after consulting with an expert, 18 questions were integrated into the semi-structure interview with BA students. The questions for MA and PhD students were developed similarly.

The aim of all the questions was to shed light on the factors that contributed to the improvement of academic writing. In doing so, the researchers tried to collect the relevant questions based on the previous research and related literature. All interviews were audio recorded.

As far as the psychometric qualities of the interviews were concerned, the researchers used the following procedures to confirm the content validity of the interviews. Fultcher (2025) claimed that content

validity must meet these two conditions: Coverage and representativeness. The contents of an instrument must cover the areas it purports to be measuring, and questions in the instrument must reflect the points in the syllabus, prior research, or objectives. Initially, we searched previous literature to familiarise ourselves with the state-of-the-art as far as standards and institutes are concerned. The researchers, then, interviewed several experts in the field to seek their opinions regarding the role of institutes and standards in L2 writing. Following these two steps, we constructed the first draft of the interviews, ensuring the items of the interviews covered and represented the objectives. Lastly, we asked two experts in applied linguistics to examine the wording, clarity, preciseness, brevity, readability, relevance, the degree of representativeness of the questions.

### **3.3. Procedure**

Three different types of semi-structured interview questions on the development of academic writing were administered to 18 BA, MA, and PhD students in Iran. All the participants answered the questions. The semi-structured interviews with both English teachers and students were conducted via phone, Telegram, and Whatsapp. All the interviews, except for two of them, were recorded via a smartphone. Two of the interviews with two BA students were face-to-face and were audio recorded due to the short distance and availability. Each interview with students took between 13 and 40 minutes. Also, each interview with teachers took between 11 and 46 minutes. One of the interviews with English teachers was delivered via Telegram. The reason why there were such different ranges of duration in the interview reflected the circumlocutory replies of participants in answering the interview questions.

After collecting the data and interviewing the participants, the researchers listened to each interview and coded the answers of the participants to the questions of the semi-structure interviews. Then, the researchers started to read and reread the codes to develop themes that encompassed the codes. The researchers, then, developed about six themes that resembled all the codes of the semi-structure interviews in this study. After that, the researchers consulted some of the participants to discuss the codes and the themes with them to ensure we had correctly understood them. Finally, five themes were developed for the questions of the present study.

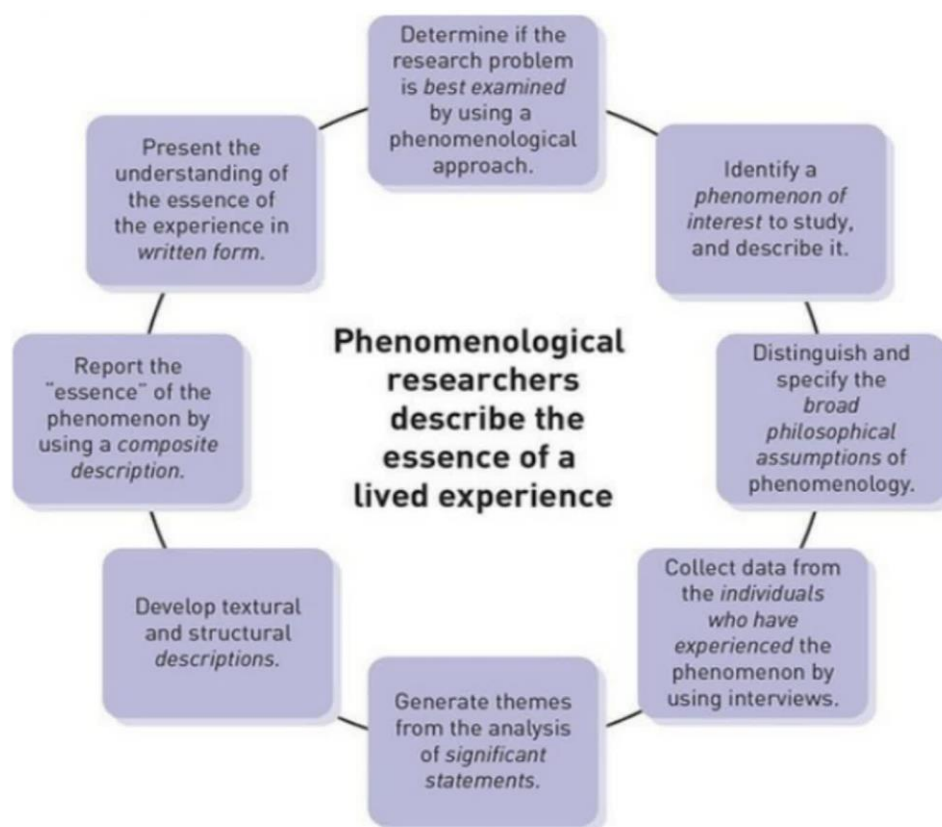
### **3.4. Research Design**

The researchers used a phenomenological approach for examining the factors that contributed to the improvement of academic writing. To

begin with, phenomenological research is most of the time a form of deep learning, which leads to the transformation of consciousness, being more thoughtful, and more perceptive (Creswell & Poth 2018). Also, phenomenological approach benefits from varied kinds of data collection procedures. Therefore, the researchers considered phenomenological approach as the best approach to investigate the research question of this study. In the present study, descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology design was used. This type of design is useful when the participants represent those who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth 2018). In this approach, understanding the meaning of the participants' experience is highlighted. Figure 1 shows the steps which we followed in our study.

### Figure 1

*Schematic Representation of Steps for Phenomenological Approach* (Creswell & Poth 2018, p. 130)



According to Figure 2, the researchers of this study used transcendental phenomenology to explore the role of institutional policies

and academic standards in the development of students' academic writing. The researchers built on the processes and steps depicted in Figure 2 to explore the factors influential in academic writing. The researchers accessed the participants' information through interviews to get at the phenomenon, here development of academic writing. Then, the researchers analyzed and described the data.

As shown in Figure 2, the researchers built on imaginative variation to intentionally seek the participants' opinions regarding what they thought about the challenges, factors, and solutions which might contribute to improved academic writing through structurally describing and analyzing their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This stage played a key role in the initial phase of the study because it helped us to align the goal of the study with the collection and analysis of data. Next, the researchers bracketed any preconceptions to phenomenologically reduce other potential factors and link the findings to the participants' actual experiences. Finally, the essence of the phenomenon (the participants' experiences) was synthesized through reading the data to identify the codes and extract the themes through inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as described in the following section.

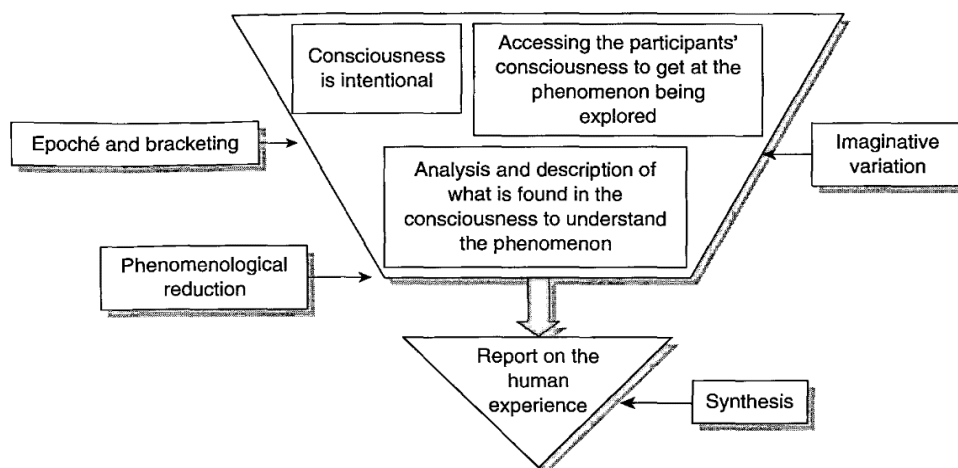
### **3.5. Data analysis**

In order to answer the research question posed in this study, the researchers collected data from the semi-structured interview data in order to analyze them for finding the themes and subthemes contributing to the improvement of students' academic writing. Then, they were coded, and patterns were identified.

In this study, the researchers applied an inductive thematic analysis, analyzing the qualitative data through a three-stage process, namely, open coding, axial coding, and labeling. In inductive thematic analysis, data are coded without necessarily regarding the preexisting coding frame or preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First of all, the researchers analytically developed or identified codes to sets of notes based on the data. The researchers, then, transformed codes into categorical labels or themes. The researchers also sorted materials by these categories while simultaneously identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalities or disparities. After that, the sorted materials were examined to isolate meaningful patterns or processes.

**Figure 2**

*Descriptive Phenomenology (transcendental) (Adapted From Edmonds & Kennedy 2017, p. 172)*

**4. Results and Discussion****4.1. Results**

The research question of this study aimed to explore factors contributing to the improvement of academic writing. Applying a descriptive phenomenology approach to examine the Iranian BA, MA, and PhD EFL students' expectations as well as those of academic writing teachers to analyze the opinions, descriptions, and significance of their experiences, the researchers categorised the assumed factors contributing to improvement of academic writing told by these EFL students into five themes as shown in Table 1. In the following paragraphs, the themes and subthemes are presented in great detail.

**Table 1***Themes of Interview With Teachers and Students*

Themes of interview with teachers and students		Subthemes for each theme
Structured composition	type of	Writing for academic purposes Clear, concise and structured type of writing Relating ideas in writing Having a correct structure and unity Using an understandable language Having authentic references and correct structure Having a terse and not prolix language without repetition

Factors contributing to improvement of academic writing	Enriching students in academic writing The role of practice in improving academic writing Increasing knowledge Background knowledge Analyzing students' improvement and giving feedback Perseverance in writing Thinking in English and reading The effectiveness of reading various books Help of professor and peer feedback Better learning by more practice Support and interaction step by step Argumentative type of teaching Providing sufficient input
Challenges to improvement of academic writing	Lack of sufficient knowledge Lack of writing literacy Too much attention to linguistic features insufficient linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge Not receiving any feedback The idea for writing Circumlocution
Solutions to improvement of academic writing	Discourse based performance The importance of academic discourse Context based teaching The importance of peer feedback and the way it is given A new and useful topic Need analysis The necessity of society
Factors contributing to institutional policies and academic standards	The issue of time Time and situational factors The importance of learning at younger age More attention on writing courses in M.A. Reading and the issue of time Having the same gender of teacher and student Having a same proficient teacher in B.A. and M.A. The importance of having proficient teacher in B.A. Being bound to intra class time schedule

The first theme was related to the structured type of composition. The inductive analysis of the teachers' definitions of academic writing showed that most of the teachers defined academic writing based on the purpose for which the composition was delivered. For example, T-4 stated that "Academic writing is the language of science; special language for science that researchers communicate through it. It is a common language for science among researchers in different majors ...". Since teachers were from different contexts in different universities, they recounted various descriptions for academic writing. Two of the teachers described academic writing in terms of clear, concise, and structured type of writing. Generally, there was no agreed-upon description for academic writing among these

teachers. For instance, T-2 stated that “If we consider writing a productive skill, we can have two kinds of writings: 1. General writing 2. Academic writing. Here, academic writing is the structured type of writing with special frameworks, rules and context.”

Students, however, expressed different definitions of academic writing. The analysis showed that most students consider academic writing a structured, rule-governed type of writing which is understandable to the reader. Generally, the definitions by the students included writing with special rules and principles, writing for academic purposes, writing with special rules and principles for academic purposes, among others. As an example, S-1 noted that “As I know, and searched before, academic writing is a clear concise structure and ... is a clear and concise kind of writing. You say what you mean.” It is essential to note that like some teachers, some of the students considered academic writing to be a language for academic purposes, which is common among scholars and researchers. As S-6 commented, “When we want to write a formal composition for a university or official centers, we call it academic writing.”

As for the second theme, both students and teachers referred to different factors for the improvement of academic writing, as outlined in Table 1. For example, T-4 noted that “reading the most up-dated materials and sources can really help for teaching academic writing; the course of writing is different to other courses; you should write and write and receive feedback in order to be expert in academic writing.” Some other teachers referred to other factors for the improvement of academic writing. Most teachers referred to students who lacked sufficient knowledge for proper academic writing, as evident in the following excerpt from T-2:

Increasing both linguistic and content knowledge can one hundred percent help students improve their academic writing. Without any of these two, students wouldn't be able to write; even though they know thousands of strategies in academic writing; because they cannot make use of them.

Although many language teachers referred to the importance of practice for students' improvement in academic writing, as in T-1 who noted that “practice, practice, practice. Practice makes perfect. The more practice in writing, the sooner you will get to saturate the required time for your better writing.”, most students considered receiving feedback and how it was given to be the most important factors in improving academic writing. For example, S-6 observed that “I have had especially a very positive experience with my teacher, because he was very detailed, I knew that he read it carefully and he gave very positive, by positive I mean useful, feedback....”.

Regarding the third theme, the challenges to the improvement of academic writing, most of the teachers referred to the lack of sufficient knowledge (both content and linguistic knowledge) in the process of

improving academic writing. As T-5 stated, “the most problematic area in improving academic writing is about the thought, about the content that we want to talk about. It is about the grammatical structures ....”. One of the teachers, however, argued that too much attention to linguistic features may also hinder the development of academic writing. Students were sometimes aware of all the rules and structures of academic writing, but they are too cautious about using them so that it would be detrimental in the outcome of their academic writing. As T-2 pointed out,

In both writing and speaking this issue exists; generally, in productive skills students can be categorized into two different groups: field dependent and not field dependent. Students who pay too much attention to grammatical points may be distracted from the main point so that they will not deliver an appropriate composition.

The thematic analysis of the data revealed that most students were dissatisfied with the way of teaching the structure of texts and receiving feedback. Though their comments varied, it is worth considering each of these factors which lead to the improvement of academic writing. Generally, they referred to not receiving any feedback, not receiving feedback for writing in PhD level, not receiving feedback for writing in MA level, situational factors, the idea for writing, the structure of the text, the structure of the text and shortage of time, the structure of the text and idea for writing, the structure of text and target population, circumlocution, the issue of prolixity. In the following two extracts, not receiving feedback, the structure of text, and target population are addressed the challenges students raised.

“There wasn’t any feedback in PhD level. All I have learned is from my BA level. In PhD level we didn’t learn anything in writing...” [S-1]

“... Learning about right writing, finding the target population, knowing exactly for whom I am writing. it really distracts me. I need to know for whom I am writing to make clearer my purpose.” [S-4]

As for the fourth theme, the solutions to the improvement of academic writing, teachers referred to discourse-based performance, the importance of academic discourse, and context-based teaching as solutions which should be considered in improving academic writing. For example, regarding context-based teaching, T-2 stated that

Before thinking about the knowledge of students, I [as a teacher] should pay attention to design tasks which are appropriate for my class. For example, I have two different academic writing class; I shouldn’t use the same structure and task for both classes. Each university is different to the other from city to city, because the cultural context is different ... .

The analysis showed that while some students did not receive any feedback, others stated that the feedback of teachers was very helpful for them in improving their academic writing. The rest of the students had different

views regarding the solutions for improving academic writing. Most of the students addressed the effectiveness of teacher feedback in improving academic writing, such as S-6, as the following extract shows: “If there is someone to edit of course I feel better, if I know there is a professional or an editor who can tell me points where I need improvement, that makes me feel better about academic writing.”

Institutional policies and academic standards have always been considered a crucial factor in education. The analysis showed that most teachers were dissatisfied with the schedule time framework planned for the writing classes. As T-3 stated that, “each session is two hours and a half, and in general, we have 16 sessions in a semester. It is almost about 32 hours. This amount of time is not enough to practice academic writing with students...” Different views about factors contributing to institutional policies and academic standards were suggested by students. Most of the students referred to the issue of time, and they were dissatisfied with the schedule time of academic writing courses. For example, S-3 had the following to share with us: “Most of the students don’t have time to write at home, so, if I want to give advice, if I want to say a comment, I think writing needs more time in university.”

#### **4.2. Discussion**

We found a discrepancy between teachers’ and students’ points of view regarding the definition of academic writing. English language teachers generally defined academic writing based on the purpose for which writing was used. This finding is in line with that of Park (2018), who stated that it seems difficult to establish a definition for academic writing. However, this study focused on the role of students’ awareness on their attitude towards writing. However, this finding is not consistent with that of Royce Sadler (2014), who defined academic writing as agreement on rubrics, criteria or other systems of coding academic achievement that were the requisites of the creation of academic standards.

The findings of qualitative data analysis of the present study revealed that the improvement of academic writing of Iranian students might be rooted in the following factors: (a) doing more practice and empowering students in academic writing; (b) increasing both their knowledge of the rules and principles of academic writing and their background knowledge; (c) perseverance in writing; and (d) providing sufficient input for presenting an acceptable piece of academic writing. Most of the students referred to receiving feedback and highlighted the importance of how it was given as one of the most important and effective factors in improvement of their academic writing. This is consistent with the study of Celik (2020), who

stated that feedback was an important tool for the development of advanced writing skills in an academic setting.

It may be significant to note that some Iranian EFL teachers are not sufficiently and appropriately trained before teaching. Improvement in academic writing needs practice and hard work, and it requires that teachers help students step by step by providing practice and giving detailed feedback. This finding is inconsistent with the study of Lam (2015), who stated that process writing assignments contributed to students' self-regulation in planning, organization, and problem solving. The findings revealed that the students had never received any feedback and, as a result, it affected their general feeling of academic writing, and they considered academic writing to be a boring course that had to be passed.

Another finding of this study was that there were different views about the challenges to the improvement of academic writing. Many teachers stated that lack of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge as well as paying too much attention to linguistic knowledge could impede the improvement of academic writing. On the other hand, most students referred to not receiving effective feedback or any feedback at all, as the most important challenge in improving their academic writing. This finding suggests that there is discrepancy in the views of teachers and students in considering the difficulties of learning academic writing. As a result, it can be understood that many problems in the process of developing academic writing may stem from the very different views of teachers and students. However, according to Celik (2020), using a process-oriented approach to providing feedback is an important tool for the development of advanced writing in an academic setting.

The fourth finding of the present study was that there was a major difference between teachers' and students' points of view towards the solutions to the improvement of academic writing. In this regard, many teachers referred to discourse-based performance and the importance of academic discourse. However, many students maintained that having a new topic, needs analysis, and the needs of society could accelerate the improvement of academic writing. In other words, they referred to the reasons for writing in order to motivate them to construct an appropriate piece of academic writing. According to McNamara and Allen (2018), without motivation, students probably would not be able to write.

As for the factors contributing to the institutional policies and academic standards, both groups generally referred to the issue of time and the need for allocating more time for writing classes. This finding is consistent with the study of McNamara and Allen (2018), who stated that time was probably the most significant factor for both teachers and students to reduce the stress of writing effectively. In other words, students need more

time and instruction to write effectively. The results of this study revealed a significant need for changing the policies and academic standards regarding the writing courses at the three levels of BA, MA, and PhD. As stated, allocating more time to writing classes, preparing teachers for teaching academic writing as a process-based task, and having a proficient writing teacher in the three levels, especially in BA programs, can facilitate learning academic writing for students as well as teaching it for English language teachers. In order to achieve such goals, policymakers and curriculum developers should strongly support teachers regarding the significant changes in education (Razmjoo & Najafi, 2017).

### **5. Conclusion an Implications**

Using semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, the researchers found that Iranian English language teachers and EFL students expressed different viewpoints about the factors, solutions, and challenges that could improve academic writing. Iranian EFL teachers mostly emphasized instructions, limited time of class and increasing knowledge. However, most of the students referred to receiving feedback as one of the most important factors that could help them to improve their level of academic writing. Practice made a significant contribution to the improvement of academic writing. Practicing academic writing is repeating writing academically by using the necessary rules and vocabulary. Many students, especially those in higher education in MA and PhD, referred to the significant role of reading in the improvement of academic writing. At the same time, it needs to be stated that reading and writing require both time and effort (McNamara & Allen, 2019). As a result, policymakers should devote sufficient time to writing courses to meet this crucial need of students.

This research may have many implications for different policymakers in educational settings. For example, policymakers can adjust their traditional policies, decide on more sophisticated and appropriate changes, and suggest plans to emphasize the essence of improving academic writing in educational settings. The findings can also be helpful for materials writers to include both the essential uses of academic writing and authentic, problem-based activities in their course books. This can provide support for teachers' and students' more cooperative and communicative work in classrooms. Educational settings (i. e., language institutes, schools, and universities) can also use the findings of the present study. They can understand the importance of improving academic writing and may take action to equip classrooms so that they are aligned with the recent types of academic writing classes, which are in line with deep learning and problem-based activities. In this way, educational settings can be a platform for teachers and students to foster learning and improving their academic writing. For example, teacher-training

centers can provide academic writing workshops and online cooperative activities to help teachers to share what they have been trained and learned.

Some limitations still exist. In the present study, the researchers focused on a single data source—semi-structured interviews. Although we used a larger number of interviews, ( $n = 24$ ) from two groups of participants, and the interviews were relatively long, single-data sources tend to be limited and do not necessarily offer a full picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Another limitation of the study concerns the methodology. This study was purely qualitative. It is true that qualitative studies delve into and explore the underlying processes, but they provide one dimension of a phenomenon. They tend to yield the best results when combined with quantitative results. Finally, as one of the reviewers noted, the use of theoretical models in phenomenology studies helps frame the study, but we did not use any theories, and we recognize it as another limitation of our study.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors thank the teachers and students who agreed to participate in the present study.

## References

- Akkaya, A., & Aydin, G. (2018). Academics' views on the characteristics of academic writing. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research, 13*(2), 128–160. <https://doi.org/10.29329/epasr.2018.143.7>
- Al-Jaryan, F. M. M., Gholami, J., & Khalili, A. (2026). Participatory language teaching: Iraqi EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies, 13*(2), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.30479/jmrels.2025.21742.2492>
- Anjarani, S., Furqon, M., Zain, D. S. M., Septriana, H., & Isnaeni, D. (2026). Pre-service teachers' experiences and pedagogical concerns on integrating ChatGPT in academic writing. *Voices of English Language Education Society, 10*(1), 11–25. <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v10i1.34008>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C. K., & Walker, D. (2014). *Introduction to research in education*. Cengage Learning.
- Bell, L., & H. Stevenson (2015). Towards an analysis of the policies that shape public education: Setting the context for school leadership. *Management in Education, 29*(4), 146–150. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0892020614555593>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Celik, S. (2020). Building critical academic writing skills: The impact of instructor feedback on Turkish ELT graduate students. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language, 24*(3), 1–18.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). SAGE.
- Crossley, S. A. & McNamara, D. S. (2017). Educational technologies and literacy development. In S. A. Crossley & D. S. McNamara (Eds.), *Adaptive educational technologies for literacy instruction* (pp. 1–12). Routledge.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). Research on teaching and teacher education and its influence on policy and practice. *Educational Researcher, 45*(2), 83–91. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16639597>
- Derakhshan, A., & Karimian Shirejini, R. (2020). An investigation of the Iranian EFL learners' perceptions towards the most common writing problems. *Sage Open, 10*(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020919523>
- Domínguez Jeria, P., Cárdenas-Claros, M. S., Figueroa-Leighton, A., Alonzo, T., & Alvarado Barra, C. (2026). Notions about drafts in scientific research articles: A case study with writers at different levels of

- expertise. *Written Communication*, 43(1), 141–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07410883251346408>
- Edmonds, W. & Kennedy, T. (2017). *An applied guide to research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. SAGE publication.
- Esfandiari, R., Meihami, H. & Jahani, F. (2022). Exploring postgraduate EFL students' academic writing experiences and expectations: A dynamic narrative approach. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 25(4), 1–24.
- Fulcher, G. (2025). *Practical language testing* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Routledge.
- Heigham, J. & Croker, R.A. (2009). Case study. In M. Hood (Ed.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 66–90). Palgrave
- Lam, R. (2015). Understanding EFL students' development of self-regulated learning in a process-oriented writing course. *TESOL Journal*, 6(3), 527- 553. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.179>
- Lee, J., & Deakin, L. (2016). Interactions in L1 and L2 undergraduate student writing: Interactional metadiscourse in successful and less-successful argumentative essays. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 33, 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2016.06.004>
- Maamujav, U., Krishnan, J., & Collins, P. (2019). The utility of infographics in L2 writing classes: A practical strategy to scaffold writing development. *TESOL Journal*, 11(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.484>
- McNamara, D. S., & Allen, L. K. (2018). Toward an integrated perspective of writing as a discourse process. In M. F. Schober, D. N. Rapp, & M. A. Britt (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of discourse processes* (pp. 362–389). Routledge.
- Moradkhani, S. & Rahimi, M. (2019). The impact of students' English proficiency level and teacher education on L2 teachers' pedagogical knowledge: A mixed-methods study. *TESOL Journal*, 11(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.496>
- Park, G. Y. (2018). *Social and psychological valence components of translingual graduate writers' inventory of strengths* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Indiana University.
- Phothongsunan, S. (2023). EFL student-directed feedback for improving academic writing skills in Thailand. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 14(1), 223–231. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4431298>
- Razmjoo, S. A. & Najafi Marboeyeh, A. (2017). The impact of self-regulatory strategies on the essay writing of EFL students with and without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Applied Research on English Language*, 6(3), 267–290. <https://doi.org/10.22108/are.2017.103735.1097>

- Royce Sadler, D. (2014). The futility of attempting to codify academic achievement standards. *Higher Education*, 67(3), 273–288. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9649-1>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE.
- Taheri, S., Khoshsima, H., Beikian, A., & Mohammadian, A. (2025). The impact of dropbox paper as an online collaborative tool on the academic writing skills of Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, 12(3), 101–127. <https://doi.org/10.30479/jmrels.2024.21117.2441>
- Troia, G.A., Olinghouse, N.G., Ya Mo, Hawkins, L., Kopke, R.A., Chen, A., Wilson, J., & Stewart, K.L. (2015). To what degree do standards signpost evidence-based instructional practices and interventions? *The Elementary School Journal*, 116(2), 291–321. <https://doi.org/10.1086/683984>
- Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2010). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1), 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010368316>
- Yang, M. (2023). Supervisory feedback, reflection, and academic discourse socialization: Insights from an L2 doctoral students' paper writing experience. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 62, 101–215. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2023.101215>
- Yung, K., & Cai, Y. (2019). Do secondary school-leaving English examination results predict university students' academic writing performance? A latent profile analysis. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 45(4), 629–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2019.1680951>
- Zhang, D. (2022). Affective cognition of students' autonomous learning in college English teaching based on deep learning. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1–9 Article e808434. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.808434>
- Zhang, F., Schunn, C., Chen, S., Li, W. & Li, R. (2023). EFL student engagement with giving peer feedback in academic writing: A longitudinal study. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 64, 101–255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2023.101255>