Difficulties Faced by Iraqi University Students Of English in the Area of Writing their Academic essays From the Students' Point of View

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Abstract

Academic writing, is a formal style and usually adopted by writers in academic community in Higher Education Institutions. However, there are several forms of writing where students are assigned to write in various genres ranging from an essay to report and dissertations. As such, it is one of the key ways by which students are assessed at university in their writing of a coursework, essays and thesis to measure their progress in learning and understanding. Academic writing is of specific features that should be taken into account when writing for academic purposes. Thus, an academic piece of writing should be formal, organized, accurate, referenced, and clear, in a way that can be read and understood readily by readers.

To fulfil the aim of the research, a sample of (100) fourth year students of English Department / College of Education for Humanities\ Diyala University have been selected as the subjects of this research. A scaled questionnaire as an instrument of measurement is used in this research to be an investigatory tool. The results of this research proves that the hypothesis of this study is verified and accepted which reads that Iraqi students of English face challenges in writing academic essays. The focus of the study has been on probing the views and the discursive practices of fourth year students in relation to academic writing.

So this paper sheds light on the most important features of academic writing such as organization, coherence and cohesion, accuracy, referencing and many other features. Finally, this paper focuses on challenges that might arise for non-native speakers of English when writing for academic purposes such as problems in spelling, punctuation, tense misuse, and electronic illiteracy.

الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلبة العراقيون الجامعيون في مجال كتابة المقالات الاكاديمية من وجهة نظر الطلبة

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الملخص

عندما نسمع عن الكتابة الأكاديمية، يتبادر الى اذهاننا مباشرة بأنها شكل من أشكال الكتابة التي تتوافق مع نمط معين يجري استخدامه في مؤسسات التعليم الاكاديمي من الجامعات والكليات، حيث اعتاد كتاب و باحثي الأوساط الأكاديمية على الكتابة باسلوب منهجي بدلا من استخدام اللغة الدارجة العامية، لتلبية مطالبهم بمؤشرات كافية. ومع ذلك، هناك عدة أشكال من الكتابة، حيث دائما ما يكلف الطلبة بكتابة مقال او تقرير اكاديمي اوأطروحة . لذا فأنها على هذا النحو واحدة من الطرق الرئيسية التي يجري تقييم طلبة الجامعة على ضوءها لقياس التقدم المحرز في التعلم والفهم في كتابة مقالاتهم وأطاريحهم الاكاديمية.

حيث ان أي بحث او مقالة اكاديمية ينبغي أن تبنى على القراءة بهدف يجري اخذه بنظر الاعتبار مثل إقناع الجمهور بمفهوم معين او المقارنة بين حدثين او فكرتين او سرد قصة معينة او تعريف مصطلح ما أو وصف شيء أو مفهوم معين. اذا ينبغي ان تؤخذ هذه المهارات ألاساسية والسمات المحددة لعملية التواصل في نظر الاعتبار عند الكتابة لأغراض علمية اكاديمية. وهكذا، ينبغي أن يكون البحث ألاكاديمي مكتوب بأسلوب نظامي منهجي و ان يكون مبني على اسس منتظمة ودقيقة، و الاعتماد على مصادر موثوقة والاستشهاد بمقتبسات منسوبة علنا لاصحابها لتفادي الوقوع بمشكلات و معوقات السرقة العلمية و الادبية، اضافة الى ذلك يجب ان يكون البحث او المقال الاكاديمي واضحا بعيدا عن الغموض ، بحيث يسهل على القراء مواصلة قرائته وسهولة فهمه.

حيث أن الغرض من هذا البحث تسليط الضوء على أهم سمات الكتابة الأكاديمية مثل سمات الاتساق والتماسك، والدقة والعديد من الميزات الأخرى والصعوبات التي ربما يعاني منها الطالب في الكتابة الاكاديمية. وأخيراً، سيركز هذا البحث على التحديات التي قد تبرز بالنسبة لغير الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية عند الكتابة لأغراض أكاديمية مثل المشاكل في الإملاء واستخدام علامات التنقيط والمعرفة الغير الكافية بالمعالجات الإلكترونية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف اعتمد الباحثان عينه مكونه من ١٠٠ طالب وطالبة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية في كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية \ جامعة ديالى لتكون عينة البحث، وكذلك تم استخدام الاستبانة المدرجة كوسيلة إحصائية في هذا البحث.

وقد أظهرت النتائج ان فرضية البحث قد أثبتت وتم قبولها والتي تنص على " ان الطلبة العراقيين يواجهون صعوبات في الكتابة الأكاديمية".

1. Introduction
1.1 Statement of The Problem and its Significance

It is an essential part of this paper is to define what is meant by academic writing. Due to its difference from all other forms of writing particularly in terms of connection to the reader, academic writing is based on specific rules, that should be organized and using formal language as Jordan (1999: 8) states that any piece of academic writing should preserve the formal style. This shows that any academic paper should utilize formal language and avoid vernacular or informal language. It is necessary to be linear as well with specific ideas that elaborate clearly every part of the subject matter or question, in a way that readers can follow what is written readily and without getting confused or deviated from the intended central topic.

Academic writing is an indispensable medium for evaluating college students' progress through exams, and writing coursework or essays .It is also a cornerstone for researchers and professors at colleges and universities to pursue their profession by writing papers in journals, contributing in conferences by proposals. All these forms of academic writing come along with specific objectives, for instance, to propose a solution for a problem, or to persuade a given audience, or to answer and explain an ambiguous question, or even to separate between what is correct and incorrect.

According to Gillett *et al* (2009:2-3) academic writing is a "social activity". This is true enough, since it brings together, let say, academic community members such as tutors, college students and authors to exchange, argue or discuss their ideas. However, It is advisable to utilize a set of complex grammatical structures and a wide range of vocabulary to keep away from repetition in academic writing as Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (2006:16-17) define academic writing in terms of complexity of grammatical rules and the variety of vocabulary. So this research is meant to provide a clear picture about the areas of difficulty the students may face in writing academic essays and it tries to answer the following question: Which aspect of their writing practice do the students find most challenging?.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The present study aims at identifying and classifying the difficulties Iraqi students may face in writing academic essays.

1.3 Limits of the study

   This study is limited to Fourth year Students of English Department in College of Education for Humanities\ Diyala University.

 1.4 The Hypothesis

   It is hypothesized that Iraqi students of English face difficulties in writing academic essays.

1.5 Procedures

    To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researcher to collect data:

1.Choosing a number of (100) students from the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities (at random) to represent the study sample.

2.Preparing an elicitation tool (rating scales questionnaire) under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine its validity and make any comments, suggestions and modifications if necessary.

 3. Interpreting the results in the light of the hypothesis by using the proper statistical means that suit the study.

1.6 Definition of Basic Terms

Challenging: It is calling for full use of one's abilities or resources in a difficult but stimulating effort: a challenging course of study; a challenging role for an inexperienced performer. a call to someone to participate in a competitive situation. (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).

Academic Writing: Academic writing is an indispensable medium for evaluating college students' progress through exams, and writing coursework or essays .It is also a cornerstone for researchers and professors at colleges and universities to pursue their profession by writing papers in journals, contributing in conferences by proposals. (Gillett *et al*,2009).

2.Theoretical Background

2.1 The Good Characteristics of Academic Writing

    Academic writing **can be distinguished** from other types of writing by the following features which **include** organisation, accuracy, objectivity, explicitness, hedging, and responsibility as well as coherence and cohesion and the formal style. Many authors base their definition of

academic writing on these characteristics such as: Jordan (1999), Greetham (2001), Fulwiler (2003), Baily (2003), Gillett *et al* (2009),and Anker (2010), , and all of them discuss these features in different ways and from various angles that lead to the same outcome for academic writers.

2.1.1 ORGANISATION

BY LOOKING AT ARTICLES IN JOURNALS, CHAPTERS IN SOURCEBOOKS OR ANY ACADEMIC ESSAY, IT MAY BE CLEAR TO DISTINGUISH THEM WITH PARTICULAR FORMULA OF ORGANIZATION. THIS FEATURE IS JUST LIKE THE STRUCTURE OF BUILDING A BLOCK. SUCH STRUCTURE USUALLY BEGINS WITH INTRODUCTION FOR TWO PURPOSES: FIRSTLY, IT AIMS TO PREPARE THE READER FOR THE PLAN OF A GIVEN ARTICLE THAT CAN BE FOLLOWED EASILY. THE SECOND GOAL OF A PREFACE IS TO ADDRESS AN ISSUE OF THE MAIN IDEA BY WRITING TOPIC SENTENCE AND THESIS STATEMENT WITH DEPENDABLE EVIDENCE AND EXAMPLES (Anker, 2010:80-7).

IF WE WANT TO GO DEEPER IN THE DETAILS OF ANY TOPIC, WE NEED TO FOLLOW OUR MAP AND TO DIVIDE THE WHOLE TEXT INTO PARAGRAPHS I.E. THE MAIN BODY, IN A WAY THAT EACH PARAGRAPH CONTRIBUTES MAINLY TO support and develop the main idea *OR AN ARGUMENT, AND TO GUIDE THE READER THROUGH GIVEN INFORMATION (JORDAN, 1999:9). FOR EXAMPLE, WE MAY PRESENT EACH CAUSE AND ITS EFFECT IN ONE PARAGRAPH, OR THE ADVANTAGES IN ONE PARAGRAPH AND THE DISADVANTAGES OF SPECIFIC PHENOMENA IN ANOTHER SECTION OF THE MAIN BODY WHEN WRITING OUR ESSAY.*

SINCE THE MAIN BODY OF TEXT IS CONSIDERED THE CENTRAL POINT OF AN ARGUMENT, IT SHOULD BE CLEAR AND WELL ORGANISED BY INTRODUCING EACH PARAGRAPH WITH TOPIC SENTENCE, SUPPORTING DETAILS WITH EXAMPLES. FINALLY, WE HAVE THE CONCLUSION IN THE STRING OF PLANNING A PIECE OF WRITING WHICH IS SUPPOSEDLY DEVOTED TO REFLECT OF WHAT IS MENTIONED EARLIER. CONCLUSION MAY BE THOUGHT AS A GIST OF THE WHOLE PIECE OF WRITING BECAUSE IT USUALLY INCLUDES THE POSITION OF THE RESEARCHERS' VIEWS WHETHER TO

CRITICISE AN OPINION, OR EVALUATE A PROCESS, OR TO DISCUSS IN FAVOUR OR AGAINST CERTAIN VIEW.

All these sections should be paragraphed, clear and coherent. However, structure and layout of the main body draw upon the length of our academic task of writing such as the arrangement of dissertation is different from a report or an essay (Baily, 2003:36).Therefore, the writers for academic purposes should keep their writing as organised and clear as possible, for example when writing a historical essay , it is important to list the events and incidents chronologically from the oldest to latest for instance "Many European countries had been destroyed during WWI in 1914 , but they managed to rebuild their nations after the World War II when the UN was founded in 1945 ".

The arrangement of coursework or dissertation in academia is very essential, but many non-native speakers of English encounter several challenges in organizing their essays or thesis in a way they seem unorganized.

2.1.2 Accuracy

Accuracy is one of the features of academic writing, where we have to pay more attention to the precision of choosing the most appropriate words and expressions, grammatical structures and more importantly the data which should be precisely associated with the subject matter or the question of an assigned coursework, as figures, facts and events. This example may illustrate this feature, the word 'shortage' is related to group of synonyms as "deficit, lack, scarce or insufficiency", the choice depends on the context of topic, we say "water scarcity" rather than "water lack". Therefore, the writer is the one who judges which word or piece of information is the most suitable to be used in a particular context. Regarding examples about the facts: there are "two world wars" not "three" or "**Earth** revolves around the Sun". We need to choose what is relevant specifically to our subject matter rather than discussing around or near the question or dealing with the problem in general, the more specific and detailed our writing is; the better it is in academic fields. For instance if we are required to write about consecutive interpreting in details, we should not deviate from the basic point and write about linguistics.

Moreover, academic writers are required to focus on spelling, punctuation and the proper use of grammatical structures as Jordan (1986 :10-18) explains in several examples to avoid such mistakes as much as possible because they confuse or change the whole meaning of any sentence. The spelling problem is the nightmare of non-native speakers of

English, though it can be solved by using spelling checker cautiously regarding distinguishing between words like "expect" and "except" in spelling.

In brief, the choice of the most relevant sources and supporting arguments to our subject matter is fundamental in academic writing. The more accurate the writers are in spelling, word choice, and grammatical structures, the better their writing is. Although it is not possible to complete any task perfectly, yet it is necessary for writers to think about near –perfectness. (Gillett *et al*, 2009: 283).

2.1.3 Explicitness and Responsibility

Clarity is considered a significant feature for academic written texts. Therefore, writers in academic field are responsible to keep the flow of given information as straightforward and connected as possible without confusing the intended audience when presenting their writing. This feature can be achieved successfully through using specific signalling words and transitions to ensure connection and organization of thoughts (Greetham, 2001:187-8). We use signalling words in various circumstances to guide readers through our writings as shown in this table.

TABLE (1) Signalling words and Transitions

SIGNALLING WORDS	Example	Purpose
FIRSTLY, INITIALLY, SECONDLY, AND FINALLY ETC	**Firstly, I will discuss culture differences. The second point will be about translating cultures.**	**Succession of ideas, or proofs instructions**
(IN COMPARISON, EQUALLY, SIMILAR) OR (HOWEVER, THOUGH, YET, BUT)	**These towers are similar in shape but different in period of their construction**	**Making comparison or contrast between two ideas or things**
BECAUSE OF , FOR , AS A RESULT , THEREFORE, IN ORDER TO	**Since academic writing is essential module, I need to opt it in order to master the thesis writing.**	**Cause and effect**
FOR EXAMPLE, SUCH AS, AS ETC	**They visited many places, for example , London, Paris and Dubai**	**Exemplification**
FINALLY, TO CONCLUDE, TO SUM UP, IN BRIEF	**To conclude , this table shows some signalling words that used in texts for purpose of clarity**	**Summary/conclusion**

2.1.4 Range and style

Academic texts are usually written with formal rather than informal style because the formality of language contributes mainly in introducing given information more precisely. In addition using formal and clear language in any paper will reflect the quality of expressing the complex themes, and the development of logical and evident argument (Jordan,1999:88). There are specific aspects that shape the formality of academic writing such as the word choice, and grammar, as explained in this table:

TABLE (2) The Formality of Academic Writing

Word Choice		Grammar	
We have to avoid the use of colloquial, abbreviated, double words verb and interrogative expressions because they are not useful means to express specific ideas clearly, as in this table		It is better to employ more formal grammatical structures in academic writing such as nominalization and modifiers ,which help writers to put ideas in a limited number of words, for example	
Informal	**formal**	**nominalization**	**Modifiers**
At the beginning Need Want	Initially, we signe the contract. This project require fund. There is a desire t change the financia system.	The ban of nuclear plants will reduce global warming threats	Huge and unpredicted earthquake hit this impoverished village

When writing a paper or assignment, it is recommended to use a more complex language rather than simple forms of grammatical structures because academic writing is usually proposed to deal with more complicated issues. Moreover the language of writing is more formal than spoken language, for instance when delivering a lecture, professors usually use a quite easier language than language of writing a paper, where the texts are based on more complex structures and passive voice. The following examples may illustrate our point:

Spoken + Active	Written + Passive
The people in the region need good way of irrigation	An efficient set of irrigation systems are required in the region
Some students did geographical studies	Geographical studies are conducted by a group of students

2.1.5 Objectivity

In academic fields, the way writers follow is to write objectively rather than personally, because the intended focus is usually on the information and the arguments they make rather than the writers or readers themselves (Gillett *et al* ,2009:94) . However, there is an exception for this rule that sometimes it is necessary to use pronouns such as "I" or "you" when the task is to combine your personal expertise with critical thought and observation to develop a more complete analysis of an experience as in fieldworks' reports. Yet it is better to be objective as much as possible, rather than subjective in proposing the outcomes of laboratory reports. For example, the researchers do not say "personally I think it is very hard job" but they would say "the researchers encounter some challenges during the work on this survey ", or "I know this novelist very well ", it is better to say "this novelist is well known for his writings ".

2.1.6 Hedging "Cautious Language"

It is one of the key characteristics of academic writing where academic community members utilize cautious or tentative rather than assertive language (Anker 2010: 668). For example:

"Desertification engulfs Arab countries"

"Desertification may engulf Arab countries"

The first example refers to high degree of certainty because the writer asserts his claim; depending on his interpretation of given information. While the second example proposes a kind of probability that this phenomenon may happen under certain conditions. Therefore it is advisable in academic writing to use cautious style in order to keep away from 100 percent because it is unlikely that the proof we present will be conclusive enough for us to state for example that "desertification" will definitely happen.

Cautious style can be expressed by using modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives and other lexical items. We need to use such kind of hedging expressions to make our claims as fair, logical and precise as possible. However, it is important for the writers to choose hedging phrase which indicates how strong the evidence they use is. Briefly, the more certain the writer is about an argument , the less tentative the language is and the opposite is true and preferable. It is time to illustrate the point by some examples of hedging words in this table:

TABLE (3) Words used in Hedging "Cautious Language"

Words used in hedging	Examples
look like, appear, seem, propose , suggest	This module seems to emphasise many points which tend to be significant
Modal verbs :could , may ,might	John may leave this country and possibly lives in Germany
Probability adjectives and adverbs: likely, possible, probable	It is likely to have financial crisis in the UAE One of the possible solutions is to buy a car

2.1.7 Referencing

Academic community members pay more attention for this feature in academic written texts, since it helps to guarantee the creditability of their presented claims. Jordan (1999:98) urges writers for not using more quotations than usual because the focus is usually on their voice. To achieve such trait, writers are in charge to justify and prove every single word and idea, whether by paraphrasing, or using quotation or even an advice by communication with professors to ensure the rights of other people's thoughts and efforts. Meanwhile, referencing by its conventions is essential for students because it supports their claims by works and ideas of others, which must be acknowledged according to the referencing conventions. For instance we should include in the main body the author's surname followed by the year of publication and the page number in order to be followed easily by readers. There is a difference in referencing books, journal articles, websites or even blogs, each one is of certain standards. To sum up, we are responsible to make our voice distinct from others' voices to avoid plagiarism, which is considered as a serious academic offense.

There are several systems to document the sources such as Modern Language Association (MLA) for fields of English and humanities, American Psychological Association (APA) for social sciences, and Harvard system of reference, which the researchers use here. Therefore referencing the sources should be correct and consistent i.e. using one standard not mixed standards.

Through their experience in university, the researchers observe many students have problems in citing references, paraphrasing, summarizing and enclosing the quotations in academic writing.

2.1.8 COHERENCE AND COHESION

COHERENCE AND COHESION REPRESENT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF GOOD ACADEMIC WRITTEN TEXTS. ACCORDING TO CARTER (1990:245) COHERENCE IS "a text which is perceived as a coherent when it makes consistent sense, with or without the help of devices of cohesion". IT DEALS WITH THE CONCEPTUAL RELATIONS OF IDEAS IN THE CONTEXT THAT KEEPS THE COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION IN THE TEXT IN A WAY THAT RESPONSE TO OUR QUESTION. WHILE COHESION REFERS TO VARIOUS grammatical connections which connect a variety of sentences to form the text FOR INSTANCE THE USE OF DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS and the transitional expressions to guide our readers and show them how the paragraphs relate to each other.

ACADEMIC TEXTS HAVE TO BE CONNECTED GRAMMATICALLY AND SEMANTICALLY TO MAKE SENSE FOR READERS. TO ACHIEVE THESE FEATURES, WE NEED TO USE A SET OF LINKING WORDS TO JOIN OUR IDEAS WITHIN SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS. THEY help writers to pursue our discussion , as well as telling readers about the direction of an argument, such as furthermore ,moreover, in case of addition , nevertheless , however, moving to another point, THEREFORE, AS A RESULT, ACCORDINGLY, SO, THUS IN CASE OF RESULT. FOR EXAMPLE "HOWEVER, IT IS TIME TO MOVE TO THE DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS IN THIS ASSIGNMENT". ANY PIECE OF WRITING SHOULD BE LINKED LOGICALLY AND CORRECT SYNTACTICALLY AND REFERENCED ACCURATELY IN ORDER TO BE READ AND UNDERSTOOD EASILY.

MOST OF THE NON-NATIVE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE THE ABOVE FEATURES IN THEIR ACADEMIC WRITING. THEY HAVE CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF PUNCTUATION MARKS LIKE COMMA, APOSTROPHE, FULL STOP ETC, WHICH CONSEQUENTLY AFFECTS THE MEANING OF THE MESSAGE AND MAKES IT INCOHERENT. MOREOVER, THEY MISUSE WORDS AND IDIOMS, AND LACK VOCABULARY AS WELL AS COMMITTING GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES. DISORGANISATION AND AMBIGUITY ARE NOT EXCEPTION FOR NON-NATIVE STUDENTS (HENCEFORTH NNS) IN THEIR WRITINGS FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES WHEN IGNORING THE USE OF SIGNALLING WORDS OR OVERLAPPING THE PARAGRAPHS.

2.2. The Challenges for Non-Native Speakers of English.

Many non- native speakers of English encounter several difficulties when writing their academic essays. These challenges may be in form of punctuation (misplace of comma, apostrophe, question mark), or misuse of words or grammatical mistakes. If we look for the causes of such mistakes, we would find the literal translation from their mother tongue to English is the main reason. We will shed the light on some of these difficulties. As Jordan (1999) and Anker (2010) examine many mistakes committed by NNS.

2.2.1 Punctuation

Since punctuation helps us to understand any text, it is significant in English academic writing. However, many NNSs misplace a comma, which has various locations in sentences, or apostrophe or full stop after a sentence as in the following examples

Misuse of comma and full stop	To pass your exam you need to study hard * To pass your exam, you need to study hard.
Misuse of apostrophe	Joys exam will be on 13th of January. Joy's exam will be on 13th of January

Non native students prefer using long and complex sentences. This, however, affects the coherence and cohesion of paragraphs in an essay and maximises grammatical mistakes. Many NNS are poor spellers, they do not capitalise first letters of proper nouns or new sentence because Arabic for instance does not contain capital letters as in this example:

They travel to manchester. As a result, such mistakes leave bad impression to readers, although students can overcome such problems by using word-processing programs cautiously.

2.2.2 Mistakes in Grammar

As Jordan (1999:126) explains that NNS usually try to employ the grammar of their native language when writing in English; this is the main reason for such mistakes i.e. literal translation, which causes several difficulties in word order, sentence structure and vocabulary as in this table:

TABLE (4) Explains The Mistakes in Grammar

subject and verb agreement	**we was in the hospital.* They has problems*** **We were in the hospital. They have problems**
misuse of third person singular	**He pay by card *** **He pays by card.**
Wrong use of verb tense	**They travel to London three days ago *** **They travelled to London three days ago**
Omission verb "to be"	**We here*** **We are here**

2.2.3 Misuse of words

English has a wide range of synonyms, which look and sound alike; therefore NNS need to be cautious when using them because they may mislead writers and consequently produce awkward mistakes in writing. The choice of synonyms depends on context and meaning in which they are used (Jordan, 1999:130). Therefore any misplaced word changes the meaning of whole sentence e.g. "accept, except, and expect" and "prospective and perspective".

Many NNS do not master the use of English collocations, which have no rule but memorisation. Such words usually come together like "give a call, bear in mind, draw attention, pay a visit, put an end, tackle problem etc". Failing to achieve such coherent use of words and fixed expressions may not leave any room for readers to pursue their reading because the passage would look strange.

2.2.4 Electronic illiteracy

Another difficulty for NNS is the illiteracy of using the most up to date electronic tools , which are produced to help writers in conducting their surveys and completing their studies by surfing internet web pages and borrowing library books electronically and processing their writings on word processor etc. Therefore, the knowledge of using internet and storing information on computer for academic purposes are very essential for writers in Academic community as Jarvis (2001, 212) figures out the crucial importance of using internet, saying "all students will clearly need to use the Internet in their academic studies". Thus, nowadays the study becomes accessible across the internet by using communication program of Skype and other programs through which teachers communicate their

students across thousands of miles while sitting in their homes. However, many NNS have problems in submitting or discussing their studies electronically, though electronic technology becomes more advanced and more obtainable.

2.2.5 Task achievement and repetition

NNS are usually criticised for being repetitive and giving more information than usual (Anker, 2010:115). Such challenge is inherited from their mother language like Arabic, in which writers used to write several sentences before embarking to the main topic. Unlike English, which prefers Grice's maxims such as :

TABLE (5) Explains Task achievement and repetition

Quantity: say the point once	Relation: be relevant to achieve the required task
Quality : be truthful	Manner: be as clear, as brief, and avoid ambiguity

Some NNS used to move away from discussing the main point of the topic into irrelevant details, the matter which makes the task unaccomplished and consequently affects the readers and even the mark of coursework.

3. Procedures
3.1 Population & Sample
3.1.1 Population

Richards et al ., (1992:282) state that population refers to any set of items, individuals, etc. which share some common and observable characteristics and from which a sample can be taken. The population of this study comprises the students of English at the Department of English in College of Education for Humanities\ Diyala University. And it is random in the selection of a representative number of 100 students from the College of Education for Humanities.

3.1.2 Sample

The logic of using a sample of subjects is to make interferences about some larger population from a smaller one (a sample) (Berg,2004:34). The sample of the research consists of (100) students of English language Department. (20) students have been randomly chosen from the College of Education for Humanities for the participation in the pilot study .The

participants in the pilot study were excluded from the sample of the final administration of the questionnaire . The sample of the students consists of 100 students of English .

3.2 Instrument of the Study

To achieve the aim and to verify the hypothesis, a questionnaire was constructed by the researchers, as shown in Table (6). At first, the researchers construct an open questionnaire contained the following open question: "what are the main challenges that face you in writing the English academic essays"?.   The researchers distribute this open question to a sample of (20) students. After analyzing the results obtained from the open questionnaire, the researchers construct the closed questionnaire and considered it as the main instrument of the present study. It consists of 15 items. These items supposed to conclude students' difficulties by three rating scales: I agree, I partially agree, I disagree. These items represent the most important challenges in writing academic essays from the points of view of the students. The type of questionnaire used in this research is rating scales questionnaire. In this scale, people can show how strongly they agree or disagree with the items of the questionnaire, i.e, there is a graduation in attitudes.

(Table 6) Questionnaire items

Which of these aspects of your writing practice do you find most challenging especially with English academic writing?

NO.	Items	I agree	I partially agree	I disagree
1.	It is difficult for most students to plan well-structured academic essays.			
2.	To make all the sections of a necessary writing paragraphed clear and coherent is a difficult task for most students.			
3.	The academic writer is required to focus on spelling, punctuation and the proper use of grammatical structures			
4	When you perform experiments and do research you attempt to demonstrate the results of your work in an objective method.			

5	*ANY PIECE OF ACADEMIC WRITING SHOULD BE LOGICALLY LINKED AND SYNTACTICALLY CORRECT AND ACCURATELY REFERENCED IN ORDER TO BE READ AND EASILY UNDERSTOOD*			
6	**Cautious style can be expressed by using modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives and other lexical items.**			
7	**In an academic text, colloquial words and expressions should be avoided, and facts and figures are given precisely**			
8	**Academic writing can be enlivened by adding personal opinions.**			
9	**To write a precise academic essay is a difficult task.**			
10	**Using long sentences in academic writing will make it more impressive.**			
11	**Academic writing uses more noun-based phrases than verb-based phrases.**			
12	**Two word verbs such as 'picked up' or 'left out' are not acceptable in academic writing.**			
13	**A paragraph that is too long makes it difficult for your audience to follow.**			
14	**The conclusion summarises what you have said and re-state your thesis statement.**			
15	**It is difficult to use the appropriate punctuation marks in order to make the reader follows the paragraph easily.**			

3.3 Face Validity

The most important quality to consider when selecting or constructing an evaluation instrument is validity. Face validity refers to the way the test looks to the examinees, supervisors or in general to the people concerned with the education of students (Al- Juboury, 2000:23).

The purpose of validation in language testing is to ensure the defensibility and fairness of interpretation based on test performance (McNamara, 2000:48).

To ensure face validity, the questionnaire was exposed to a jury of experts* in the field of English language. They are especially required to determine the suitability of the questionnaire items to the sample of the study, and to propose and make any necessary suggestions for modifications, deletion or addition that enrich and sharpen the test. The jury have agreed that the test and the procedures are suitable except for some modifications which have been taken into consideration.

 *The jury of experts consist of the following members whose names are arranged according to scientific titles:

1. Prof. Khalil Ismail Rijia (Ph.D) College of Education for Humanities, University of Diyala.
2. Asst. Prof. Zainab Abbas (Ph.D) College of Education for Humanities, University of Diyala.
3. Instructor. Arwa Abdulrasoul Salman Ibrahim (Ph.D.) College of Education for Humanities, University of Diyala.
4. Instructor. Ghazwan Adnan Mohammed (Ph.D). College of Education for Humanities, University of Diyala.
5. Instructor. Ya'arub Mahmood Hamidi (MA). College of Education for Humanities, University of Diyala.

3.4 Pilot Administration

Before conducting the final administration, it is highly preferred to run a pilot administration and to revise the instrument of the study according to the results obtained from this administration.

The aim of the pilot study is to find out the clarity of the questionnaire instruction. In order to conduct a pilot study, 20 students of English were chosen randomly from the English department\College of Education for Humanities\ University of Diyala.

The findings of the pilot administration reveal the followings :

1. The students are able to answer all the questionnaire items.
2. There is no serious ambiguity in the instructions of the questionnaire.

3.5 Final Administration of the Questionnaire

After achieving face validity, the questionnaire in its final version was administrated to students of English language department\College of Education for Humanities. They were asked to either agree or partially agree or disagree on the problems they might face in writing academically.

3.6 Overall Performance

In order to investigate the hypothesis of the study which reads " students face challenges in writing academic essays". The responses of the subjects were investigated by using the weighted mean. The mean score of the subjects was (53.32) compared with the theoretical mean (30). This result indicates that the score mean is higher than the theoretical mean .This proves that students of English face challenges in writing academic essays. Accordingly, the hypothesis that mentioned above is verified and accepted.

(Table 7) The Responses of The Subjects

Item No.	I agree	I partially agree	I disagree	The Weighted Mean.
1	80	10	10	80%
2	69	16	15	69%
3	70	13	17	70%
4	40	20	40	40%
5	72	11	17	72%
6	29	32	25	29%
7	30	25	45	30%
8	40	40	20	40%
9	55	22	23	55%
10	65	22	13	65%
11	75	10	15	75%
12	60	13	27	60%
13	63	18	20	63%
14	38	32	30	38%
15	28	28	44	28%

4. Conclusions, Recommendations, Pedagogical Implications
4.1 Conclusions

Through the context of this paper, we have observed how the non native students of English should deal with significant features of good academic writing in their academic writing. The researchers considered the weighted mean of the items that ranges from (55% to80%) as difficult topics.

Conclusion remarks can be clearly pointed out as follows:

1. Item number (1) which reads "**It is difficult for most students to plan well-structured academic essays"** has got higher weighted mean which

is (80%), in other words , this constituted the first challenge faced by students.

2. Item number (11) which reads "**Academic writing uses more noun-based phrases than verb-based phrases)** has got a weighted mean of (75%). It constituted the second difficulty faced by students.

3. Item number (5) which reads "**Any piece of academic writing should be logically linked and syntactically correct and accurately referenced in order to be read and easily understood'** has got a weighted mean of (72%).

4. Item number (3) which reads "*THE ACADEMIC WRITER IS REQUIRED TO FOCUS ON SPELLING, PUNCTUATION AND THE PROPER USE OF GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES" HAS GOT A* weighted *MEAN OF (70%).*

5. Item number (2) has got a weighted mean of (69%) and this item reads:

(All the sections of an essay in academic writing should be paragraphed, clear and coherent).

6. Item number (10) has got a weighted of (65%) and this item reads:

(Using long sentences in academic writing will make it more impressive).

7. Item number (13) which reads "**A paragraph that is too long makes it difficult for your audience to follow.".** has got the second order with a weighted mean of (63%).

8. Item number (12) which reads "**Two word verbs such as 'picked up' or 'left out' are not acceptable in academic writing."** has got a weighted mean of (60%) .

9. Item number (9) has got a weighted mean of (55%) and this item reads: **(Academic writing should be precise is a difficult task.).**

4.2 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendation
     In the light of the findings achieved and conclusions derived , the following pedagogical implications and recommendations are drawn :

1.Iraqi students of English language should use formal style in writing essays. However, many NNS can benefit from their mistakes by looking at resources and websites which are based on English for Academic Purposes to overcome the challenges in terms of grammatical structures,

punctuation marks and the word choice as well as learning how to reference the sources in their essays and coursework.

2. English academic texts written by Iraqi students of English language should be properly punctuated, syntactically correct, well organised, accurately referenced, clearly discussed, logically connected and directly addressing the question.

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