

# ACADEMIC WRITING DIFFICULTIES OF ESL LEARNERS

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## Abstract

*This small-scale survey investigated the academic writing challenges of ESL learners. It aimed at answering two questions which are what are the academic writing difficulties encountered by ESL learners and what are the factors that may cause these difficulties? The subjects were 20 postgraduate students of four nationalities studying at a university in Australia. Two questionnaires were used to gather the data of this study. Questionnaire 1 contains closed questions. To support the quantitative data collected from the first questionnaire, 2 subjects were asked to complete a similar questionnaire and it mostly contains open-ended questions. The results suggest that the subjects tend to have similar difficulties in academic writing regardless of their previous educational contexts. The most common one is related to language use as well as coherence and cohesion. Others are related to writing own voice, finding relevant topics and sources; and the last and less problematic one is referencing and citations. Another conclusion which can be drawn is that a variety of factors may contribute to those difficulties. The main factor is the lack of previous experience and knowledge about the conventions of academic writing and the expectations of the institution they are studying at.*

**Keywords:** TESOL, ESL, academic writing, writing conventions, product approach, process approach, genre approach, L1 interference, EFL

## Introduction

Academic writing has been a crucial area of research in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) field. The underlying rationale could be the manifest increase of academic writing significance as students move to a higher level of education. Academic writing can be defined as "...a mental and cognitive activity since it is a product of the mind" (Al Fadda, 2012, p. 124). Abu-Ghararah and Hamzah (1998, p. 87) describes academic writing as "... the logical organization and arrangement of the written sentences within a paragraph and paragraphs within the units of discourse ...and the expression of the ideas". Another aspect of academic writing is that it "...can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual" (Burke, 2010, pp. 41). From these three definitions, it can be concluded that academic writing could be a complex process. It involves a variety of aspects that are believed to be the base of successful academic writing. Al Fadda (2012) indicates that one of the basics of academic writing is the ability of the learners to access the relevant references and evaluate them in order to put the different ideas and opinions together so that they can develop their own voice. That is a writer student should have the ability to exploit others' ideas and write them in his/her own words and then index from where those ideas have been taken (Dehkordi & Allami, 2012). As noted by Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010), other fundamental writing conventions include making an outline, summarizing and paraphrasing without which students might struggle when writing their tasks. Other basic elements are forming, developing, and organizing ideas (Amin & Alamin, 2012). Furthermore, in order to have a free-error piece of writing, learners should carefully consider how to form a thesis statement, to write convincing supporting sentences, and finally edit them (Alsamdani, 2010). Finally, Al Fadda (2012) points out that learners have to be familiar with punctuation marks such as the period, comma, semicolon, colon, dash, hyphen, and capitalization.

## Background

No one can deny that academic writing is of importance not only to master English language but also to be successful in learning other disciplines where English is the medium of instruction. Bjork and Raisenen (1997, p.8) believe that the essence of writing lies on the fact that it is "a thinking tool. It is a tool for language development, for critical thinking... for learning in all disciplines." Abdulkareem (2013) confirms that academic writing has a fundamental impact on learners' progress in a second language.

Regarding those learners of other majors rather than English language, Leki and Carson (1994) report that their progress and attainment in their disciplinary courses highly likely depend on their mastery of academic writing. Chou (2011) conducted a study on the students' perspectives toward academic writing and the researcher finds out that they consider academic writing of importance since it is a starting point for publishing their work and a way to let other people know their interests.

Due to the great value of writing skill, a considerable number of researchers have demonstrated various views regarding how to teach writing in general and writing conventions in particular. For instance, there has been an argument over whether to consider the product approach (focusing on the final product and generating grammatically correct texts) or the process approach (paying more attention to the underlying process of writing). Badger and White (2000) suggest that the later approach implicitly involves the practice of linguistic skills. However, due to its ignorance to the social and academic setting, it was criticized by several scholars (Yiu, 2009). Consequently, Genre approach, which is a third dominant approach, has appeared specifically as a result of the communicative approach. Grami (2009, p. 30) defines it as the approach that "...again focuses on writing as a product, and in some ways is an extension to product approach, but with attention being paid to how this product is shaped according to different events and different kinds of writing."

Besides writing teaching methods, the challenges of academic writing are another concern that has been noticeably considered by scholars. Academic writing is not an easy skill to be achieved especially in a second language. Mohan and Lo (1985) confirm that, generally speaking, a lot of ESL learners find academic writing problematic. A research conducted by Bacha (2012) in an EFL context has revealed that teachers find students' academic writing weak. It is assumed to be specifically difficult for those of "non-Anglicized linguistic and cultural and backgrounds" (Al Fadda, 2012, p. 123); for example, Asians are believed to face more problems in academic writing (Casanave & Hubbard, 1992). This is also emphasized by Rabab'ah (2003) who states that learners coming from Asian universities usually encounter difficulty in getting use to the requirements of English academic writing. A significant number of studies have presented the common problems encountered by ESL learners and the reasons that could be behind those difficulties as shown in the literature review below.

## **Literature Review**

### **Academic writing challenges**

Writing could be a difficult skill to be learnt or taught due to the fact that it is not a simple cognitive activity; rather it is believed to be a complex mental production which requires "careful thought, discipline and concentration" (Grami, 2010, p. 9). Al Fadda (2012) found out that the main challenges ESL students encounter are differentiating between written and spoken words and phrases, reviewing grammar including subject-verb agreement and joining sentences together to make a coherent paragraph. Generating ideas about their topics could be also a barrier that hinders students to move on in their writing (Al Murshidi, 2014). Another concern is to read and then to write in their own words. This could lead to grammar mistakes which may make students reluctant to paraphrase and summarize other's work (Amin & Alamin, 2012); instead, they just copy and paste.

### **Factors causing the academic writing difficulties**

Chou (2011) has listed a number of reasons why international students studying in an English-speaking country encounter a lot of stress and obstacles when writing their assignments. Firstly, students might come from different cultural backgrounds where they are fully dependent on teachers. They also have not been trained to be critical thinkers and they might have lower expectations than those of their teachers as they consider themselves second language learners.

Writing teachers with high expectations might suppose that students are qualified enough to produce accurate pieces of writing and they might also assign demanding topics that learners might struggle when writing about (Al

Murshidi, 2014). Low language proficiency might also obstruct academic writing. Ghabool, Edwina, and Kashef (2012) state that this problem could be the basic source of the challenges students may have in their writing. For instance, the novice writers find it very challenging to establish an effective discussion in the target language (Shafie et al, 2010). As concluded by Al-Khairi (2013), the participants of his study declared that their major problems comprise grammatical errors, the inappropriate choice of vocabulary, irregular verbs, and incorrect punctuation and spelling. Other causes that could lead to the difficulty in academic writing are L1 interference, inadequacy of ideas, and unclear instructions of the task (Chou, 2011). Regarding ambiguous description of the task, Chou (2011) concludes the participants in his study admitted that they feel shy and unconfident to ask teachers for clarification. Finally, Can (2009) claims that conflicting feedback provided by instructors from different departments in an institution might lead to the lack of students' confidence in their writing skills.

The current study contributes to the research in terms of offering valuable insights into the most difficult aspects of writing faced by international students studying in a university in Australia and how those challenges might relate to their writing strategies. It also sheds light on the key factors that could cause those difficulties in their point of view.

### **Importance of the Study**

Academic writing can be considered as an integral part of learning English process. By recognizing the learners' academic writing difficulties and needs, there will be a clear picture of the most effective and efficient course books to be adapted in their program. Needless to say, teachers do their best and exert a lot of time and effort to enhance their learners' writing. Unfortunately, in most cases the final writing production is not as good as expected to be. That is why the majority of instructors find writing the most difficult skill to teach (Al Murshidi, 2014). The results of the present study yield fundamental insights that could contribute to more beneficial guidance for the teachers and course books designers. The findings can be also essential in terms of suggesting some possible solutions for the challenges that second language learners encounter in academic writing. They could also give some insights for English as foreign language teachers to equip their students with the required knowledge and skills before they start studying at a new academic discourse community especially in an English-speaking country.

### **Research Questions**

The current study aimed at answering the following questions:

1. What are the basic academic writing difficulties encountered by international students studying in an English-speaking country?
2. What are the main factors that may cause those difficulties?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

The subjects were 20 postgraduate international students of four nationalities (namely Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Omani) who were studying a prerequisite course called Graduate Certificate in TEFL before they start their masters' degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at a university in Australia. This intensive program is basically meant to develop the skills of international postgraduate students and to prepare them for the MEd (TESOL) degree. From Table1, it is clear that 95% of the participants were females who enrolled in this course. Moreover, all of them were specialized in education field except for two participants. They reported that they took the IELTS and the mean of their writing scores is 6. This indicates that they have a good base in English language in general.

Table 1: *Participants' Biodata*

Number and gender	19 females & 1 male
Age	20-45 years old
Nationality	10 Korean, 7 Chinese, 2 Taiwanese, 1 Omani
Time already spent in Australia	3 months - 4 years
Major	18 education, 2 other (music & social work)
IELTS writing score	5.5 – 6

### Research method

Two questionnaires (Questionnaire 1 & Questionnaire 2) were used to gather the data. Questionnaire 1 (see appendix-I, pp. 11-12) was given out to 18 students. It includes four sections: students' biodata (section 1), students' writing strategies and behavior (section 2), learners' attitudes towards writing assignments and the references they prefer to use (section 3), and finally the difficulties they face when writing (section 4). This questionnaire contains closed questions. To support the qualitative data collected from the first questionnaire, 2 subjects were asked to complete another one and it mostly contains open-ended questions (see appendix-II, pp. 13-14). These questions are similar to the ones in Questionnaire 1 in terms of the information required. The total number was 20 participants (18 Questionnaire1, 2 Questionnaire2).

### Procedure

Firstly, the validity of the questionnaires was achieved by conducting a pilot study. Two students were given the questionnaires (Questionnaire1 & Questionnaire2) to complete. After slight modifications, a total number of 20 questionnaires were distributed among international students at a university in Australia. After that, the data was collected and all the questionnaires were reported as valid. Eventually, the information was analyzed, the findings were discussed and supported by literature, and some recommendations were suggested.

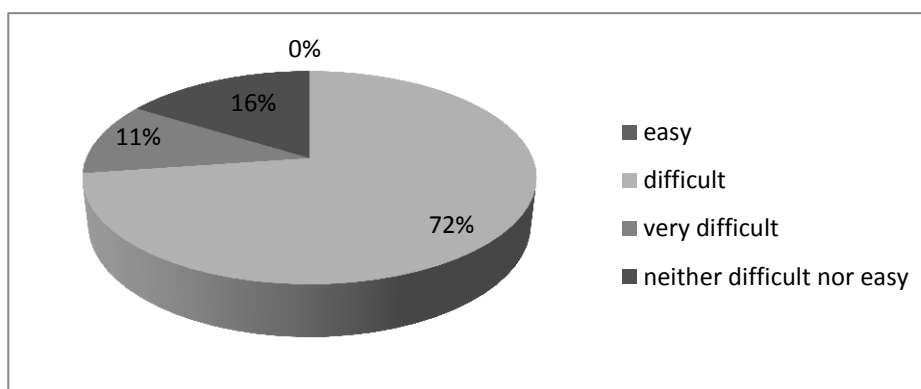
### Findings and Discussion

This section gives answers to the research questions mentioned above. From the most challenging one to the least, four major problems reported by the respondents are listed and discussed preceded by a brief description of their attitudes towards academic writing.

#### Attitudes of the participants towards academic writing

Figure1 illustrates what the participants think about academic writing. It can be clearly seen that the majority of them find writing in English difficult and none of them said that it is easy. Only 16% (n= 3) of the respondents reported that it is neither difficult nor easy.

Figure 1: Attitudes of participants towards academic writing

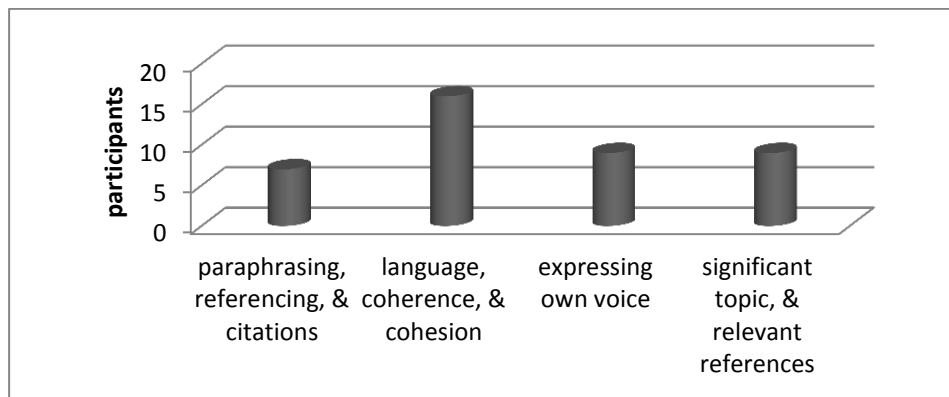


One reason for this negative attitude could be the lack of background knowledge about the conventions of academic writing. A student answered to the open-ended question whether she finds academic writing difficult and why, "Yes, because I have not experienced it before and I am unfamiliar with the academic structure and vocabulary I should use." This goes in line with Yasuda's study (2004) who found that, in such cases, students struggle to accomplish their assignments. Despite of that, half of the participants mentioned that they still sometimes write for pleasure in English.

### Major difficulties encountered by students when writing assignments

According to participants' responses, there are four basic difficulties shared by most of the participants taken Graduate Certificate in TEFL Course. As it is shown in figure 2, the most frequent difficulty is language use, coherence, and cohesion followed by both expressing their own voice as well as selecting a significant topic and relevant references. On the contrary, paraphrasing, referencing, and citations were reported to be the least problematic. In the following, those difficulties are presented and discussed separately.

Figure2: Major difficulties encountered by graduate certificate students when writing assignments



#### *Language, coherence, and cohesion*

Writers usually aim at producing a piece of writing where the vocabulary is carefully chosen, the sentences are logically related, the ideas are clearly expressed, and the paragraphs are coherent. Based on students' responses, the data indicates that a considerable number of them (16) are aware of the importance of coherence and cohesion in academic writing, yet they find achieving them quite difficult. Wenyu and Yang (2008) indicate that students who follow a clear outline and plan find it easy to organize their ideas and relate them to each other. About 88% of the graduate certificate students stated that they tend to make an outline before they begin writing their assignments, but they still have that problem. As one of the respondent stated, the reason of this difficulty could be ascribed to the fact that they do not have enough knowledge about cohesive devices, the academic words, and the structure and the organization of the academic writing. She also added, "I have never written as long paper as the ones we have been asked to write in Graduate Certificate Course. In fact, it is hard for me to write a 1000-word assignment." The majority of the respondents also claimed that they always proofread their work and about third of them ask other students to edit their writing.

#### *Significant topics and relevant references*

Although about 72% to 77% of the respondents claimed that they tend to check carefully the assignment requirements as well as discuss their topics with classmates, half of them stated that they have to make a concerted effort to choose a topic and support it with appropriate literature. As Frank, Haacke, and Tente (2003, p.170) mention, students might be unfamiliar with their teacher's expectations with respect to selecting the appropriate "literature from the wealth of publications available." This difficulty could be attributed to, as 11 of the respondents declared, their reluctance to ask their teachers to clarify the assignment task.

#### *Expressing their own voice*

Finding their own individual voice among other writers' voices is problematic for 9 of the graduate certificate students. Some of them said that making a balance between their own views and what they read is something hard to do. This is one of the conclusions found by Yasuda in her case study of Japanese postgraduate students in Monash University (2004). That could be because, as one of the participants reported, they sometimes do not have sufficient background information about the issue they are writing about. Another reason might be the lack of confidence. That is, students may feel they are not as experts as those writers who are both experienced and intelligent, as they think. Consequently, they might feel unconfident to include their ideas among those of other writers. Becker (1986, cited in Murry & Moore, 2006) comments on that by advising students to never underestimate their aptitudes for skillfully expressing their own views.

### ***Paraphrasing, referencing and citations***

The previous challenge is mainly related to transferring students' own thoughts into words. In contrast, this section focuses on the difficulty of incorporating the other writers' ideas into their own views. According to the participants' responses, this issue involves three aspects; paraphrasing, citations, and referencing. About 44% of the participants consider citations and referencing as a dilemma. That might be due to involving lots of details and the lack of awareness of its significance (Wallace, Schirato, & Bright, 1999). Although the participants have been introduced to the topic of references and citations once they joined the program in the university in Australia, being introduced to these writing aspects for the first time could be the source of this difficulty. Considering paraphrasing skill, Yasuda (2004) points out that it was the most difficult aspect for her case subjects.

Those subjects of Yasuda's research declared that they had not learnt this strategy or paid much attention to plagiarism back in Japan before they came to study in Australia. This can also be applied to the participants of graduate certificate students in the current study.

### **Conclusions and Recommendation**

On the basis of the results of this study, some solutions can be suggested to avoid writing difficulties presented above and thus improve writing proficiency. Various basic points should be taken into consideration when dealing with academic writing especially in EFL contexts. For example, adequate exposure to academic writing conventions, academic words and phrases, and grammar can play an essential role in producing a satisfying piece of writing (Abdulkareem, 2013). Therefore, as stated by Tahaine (2010), academic writing should be considered as an integral part of universities programs as students at this level need effective writing skills to achieve the assigned tasks like writing essays or even to take lecture notes. That is students should be equipped with these necessary skills to accomplish their writing tasks of their faculty. This section presents, in some details, suggestions teachers can bear in mind when teaching academic writing.

### **Identifying students' needs and difficulties**

As a starting point, writing teachers and curriculum designers in non-English-speaking language countries should consider the needs and the challenges of learners to prepare them with prerequisite skills and academic writing conventions (Chou, 2011). AL Khairy (2013) emphasizes the importance of the diagnostic tests at the beginning of the semester in order to identify students' problems and needs according to which the content of the program will be tailored. Chou (2011) mentions examples of the areas that should be covered which are making students autonomous learners, exposing them to different types of references, asking them to intensively read, and improving their analytical skills. That is they should be trained *how* to write not merely *what* to write.

### **Expectations of the teachers and institutions**

Being aware of the requirements of the task and the instructor's expectations is a fundamental factor to be successful in academic writing (Pillai, 2014). Amin and Alamin (2012) also focus on the importance of reminding students with the requirements of academic writing throughout the writing process. The matter of the number of the assignments required in each unit in the academic program should be considered carefully (Graves, Hyland, & Samuels, 2010) as well as the word count of each assignment.

### **Academic writing conventions and strategies**

Abdulkareem (2013) asserts that teaching students how to brainstorm ideas can contribute in minimizing their problems in academic writing. Furthermore, Al Fadda (2012) concludes that preparing an outline of their topics before starting to write, and following the three main stages (planning, writing, and editing) might assist novice writers to be successful in academic writing. Introducing learners to academic writing strategies and how to develop ideas, and that could help them in their writing throughout the semester as Crosby (2009) suggests. She indicates that it could be essential to give learners samples to identify their structures, organizations, cohesive devices and the other key features. For instance, authentic items could play a substantial role to achieve that objective (Wenyu and Yang, 2008). Readings such as books, journals, and even some websites are invaluable source on which learners could rely to enrich their lexicon with academic vocabulary and expressions (Gordon, 2008). Therefore, as Gordon believes, they will be able to effectively express their views and ideas in their own voice.



That means, with teachers' assistance, students can make the best use of the readings provided by their universities. Other scholars like Olness (2005) also argue that appropriate reading material could play an essential role in improving learner's writing. He assumes that novice writers are highly likely to "transfer these rich experiences to their own writing" (p.9). In other words, they will be familiar with the different writing styles, the structure, and other elements of various genres. This has been already affirmed by Krashen (1993) who believes that reading helps students acquire language skills unconsciously. That is they become "adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style, and become good spellers" (Al Murshidi, 2014, p. 59). Consequently, their motivation to write will increase dramatically (Liao & Wong, 2008). As affirmed by Al Murshidi (2014), learners should be given the choice to read what interests them. Furthermore, language level of the assigned readings should be appropriate to the language proficiency of the students (Herrero, 2007). Moreover, Amin and Alamin (2012) suggest that instructors can give out samples of excellent assignments written by other students and hold guided discussion with the students in order to assist them develop the sense of critical thinking and how to transfer other's work into their own words.

### **Relevant references, paraphrasing, and in-text citations**

Since searching for useful references is a fundamental step in writing process, guiding students to identify the relevant sources and how to find them should be considered as of paramount importance to teachers. It should be one of their priorities and that could be attained by specifying part of the course to train students how to find references and cooperate with the library that could help them to develop their skills to find them electronically (Brosig & Kas, 2008). Brosig and Kas add that one factor of success is the ability of the learners to locate the references and evaluate them in terms of their quality and relevance. Another primary point is referencing and citations. Appropriate use of the sources without stepping on the spot of what is called the academic crime (plagiarism) is one of the crucial issue second language learners should be aware of. Pecorari (2008) explains how to assist students to avoid plagiarism and use the references appropriately. She believes that it is not enough to tell learners about how serious this topic is; rather they should provide them with enough examples and make sure that they are knowledgeable about how to paraphrase other writers' words, use quotations, and accurately write citations and reference lists.

### **Language proficiency**

With respect to linguistic errors, Al Khairy (2013) confirms that teachers should exert a lot of effort to identify the contemporary teaching methods that might motivate students to actively participate in the classroom and attain high language proficiency. He also recommends that the institution should provide good dictionaries and the teachers should assure that students bring them to the classroom to be used as a reference whenever needed. Teachers can also assist their students to have a control over their writing in L2 by raising their awareness regarding the essence of self-editing, and the available choices and the impacts of those choices (Al Fadda, 2012). The subjects of her study also asserted that the computer-assisted writing instruction can guide them to achieve a good piece of writing. Learners should also select what interests them to write about and focus on the quality of the writing they produce (Yugianingrum, 2010). When students write about topics of their interests, this motivates them to keep reading and selecting what significant to them even if they encounter difficulties (Al Murshidi, 2014).

Finally, Yugianingrum (2010) emphasizes that it is not only the learners' skills and effort which are essential to have good writing, but also the cultural background and the institution he/she belongs to. In other words, writing has to be an integral part of the society and the learners should be provided by sufficient database with relevant references. Adding to that, as indicated by Al Fadda (2012), confidence can also play a major role in overcoming the difficulties in academic writing.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The current study investigated the challenges of a small number of postgraduate international students of TESOL specialization in an English-speaking country. Therefore, there should be an in-depth investigation to be carried out on the difficulties of academic writing of a larger number of ESL learners of different majors rather than educational field. Finally, learners in EFL contexts could have different difficulties and different external and internal factors causing the difficulties in academic writing. This issue is also worth investigation.

## Biography

Ibtisam Ali Hassan Al Badi holds a Master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) from Sydney University in Australia. She works for the Ministry of Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman, and currently teaches English at Sohar College of Applied Sciences.

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### Appendix-I: Questionnaire 1

#### Difficulties Encountered by ESL learners When Writing Assignments

I am carrying out a survey on the difficulties encountered by ESL learners when writing assignments. *ESL learners* stands for English as second language learners. I wonder whether you would be willing to answer some questions.

Date: .....

#### Section 1: Biodata

1. Gender:  male  female
2. Age:  20-25  26-30  31-35  36-40  41-45  46-50  51 and above
3. Choose A, B, or C to describe your level of English:  
A) Pre-intermediate B) Intermediate C) Upper-intermediate D) advanced
4. Your IELTS Writing Score:  
 Less than 5  5  5.5  6  6.5  7 and above
- If you haven't taken IELTS, choose A, B, C or D to describe your writing level:  
A) weak B) good C) very good d) excellent
5. Last college/university degree: .....  
Last occupation: .....
6. Nationality: .....  
First Language: .....  
Time already spent in Australia: .....

**Section 2: Students' writing strategies and behavior**

How often do these statements apply to you *when* writing assignments? Put a tick (✓) in the suitable column.

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>always (100%)</b>	<b>usually (80%)</b>	<b>often (60%)</b>	<b>sometimes (40%)</b>	<b>rarely (10%)</b>	<b>never (0%)</b>
1. I write for pleasure in English in my free time						
2. I go back to check carefully the assignment requirements and instructions						
3. I ask my teacher about the points I am not sure about or I need help with.						
4. I discuss what I am going to write with other students						
5. I brainstorm and write down ideas about the topic.						
6. I make an outline including the main points of my assignment.						
7. I go back to my writing to revise the content and make my ideas clearer.						
8. I go back to my writing to edit the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.						
9. In my assignments, in general, I pay more attention to the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) than to the content (e.g. ideas, organization)						
10. I pay more attention to the content (e.g. ideas, organization) than the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary)						
11. I give almost equal attention to both the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) and the content (e.g. ideas, organization)						
12. I discuss my work with other students to get feedback on how I can improve it.						

**Section 3: Students' attitudes towards writing assignments in English and the sources they like to use**

1. In general, you find writing assignments in English:  
 A) easy    B) difficult    C) very difficult    D) neither difficult nor easy
  
2. The reference(s) you mostly use:  
 A) books    B) journals    D) both    C) other s(specify) .....

**Section 4: Students' difficulties in academic writing**

Put a tick next to the weaknesses or/and difficulties you have faced when writing your assignments.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> paraphrasing                  | <input type="checkbox"/> referencing & citation       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> language use                  | <input type="checkbox"/> coherence & cohesion         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> expressing own voice          | <input type="checkbox"/> choosing a significant topic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> finding a relevant references | <input type="checkbox"/> others (specify) .....       |
|  | .....   |
|  | .....   |
|  | .....   |

*This is the end of the questionnaire*

**Appendix-II: Questionnaire 2**

**Difficulties Encountered by ESL learners**

**When Writing Assignments**

I am carrying out a survey on the difficulties encountered by ESL learners when writing assignments. *ESL learners* stands for English as second language learners. I wonder whether you would be willing to answer some questions.

**Date:** .....

**Section 1: Biodata**

1. Gender:  male  female

2. Age:  20-25  26-30  31-35  36-40  41-45  46-50  51 and above

3. Choose A, B, or C to describe your level of English:

B) Intermediate    B) upper-intermediate    C) advanced

4. Your IELTS Writing Score:

Less than 5     5     5.5     6     6.5     7 and above

If you haven't taken ILETS, choose A, B, C or D to describe your writing level:

B) weak    B) good    C) very good    d) excellent

5. Last college/university degree: .....

Last occupation: .....

6. Nationality: .....

First Language: .....

Time already spent in Australia: .....

**Section 2: Students' writing strategies and behavior**

What are the steps you usually follow and the strategies you use when writing assignments.

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**Section 3: Students' attitudes towards writing assignments in English and the sources they like to use**

- 1. Do you find writing assignments in English difficult? Why or why not?

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- 2. What kinds of references do you usually use?

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**Section 4: Students' difficulties in academic writing**

What are the main weaknesses or/and difficulties you have faced when writing your assignments?

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*This is the end of the questionnaire*