



Teaching Academic Writing Skills to the E.S.L. Students: A Pedagogical Framework

Tayyibah Khan¹, Dr Shakira Khatoon²

¹Research Scholar, Dept of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP, India

²Assistant Professor, Dept of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP, India

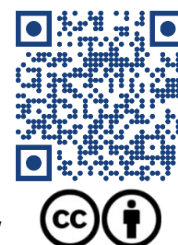
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Abstract— Academic writing has emerged as a cornerstone of higher education, yet it remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to acquire. Undergraduate students, particularly those in non-English-dominant contexts, often struggle with accuracy, organization, and the formal register expected in academic discourse. This study investigates pedagogical approaches to teaching academic writing to undergraduate ESL learners, focusing on the integration of product, process, genre, and process-genre within an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) framework. Drawing on classroom-based interventions at Aligarh Muslim University, the present study examines how structured tasks—ranging from paraphrasing and summarizing to cohesion-building and hedging—enhance learners' ability to produce coherent and accurate academic texts. Findings indicate that scaffolding writing through recursive processes and genre awareness improves both linguistic accuracy and rhetorical effectiveness. The study concludes by highlighting pedagogical implications for ESL writing instruction, stressing the need for integrative approaches that address linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of writing.

Keywords— academic writing, ESL learners, undergraduate education, English for Academic Purposes, genre pedagogy, process approach



I. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing has long been recognized as one of the most complex and cognitively demanding aspects of language use, requiring students not only to command advanced grammatical and lexical resources but also to engage in higher-order thinking processes such as synthesis, evaluation, and argumentation. Unlike conversational English, which allows for flexibility and informality, academic writing demands precision, formality, organization, and objectivity. It is a gatekeeping skill in higher education, as success in coursework, examinations, research projects, and dissertations is largely determined by one's ability to communicate effectively in written academic discourse (Hyland, 2016; Swales & Feak, 2012).

For ESL learners at the undergraduate level, the challenges of academic writing are magnified. Many enter university with limited exposure to extended written discourse in English, often relying heavily on memorized structures or

translation from their first language. Consequently, they struggle with organization, accuracy, appropriate academic register, and the ability to integrate sources. These difficulties have practical consequences: poor writing performance frequently hinders overall academic achievement, limits participation in scholarly conversations, and impedes future professional mobility in a globalized economy where academic literacy is increasingly tied to employability (Lekki, 1991; Hamp-Lyons & Kroll, 1997).

The Indian higher education context exemplifies these challenges. Institutions such as Aligarh Muslim University attract a large population of ESL students who are academically capable but underprepared in English writing skills. Despite strong disciplinary knowledge, their inability to meet the demands of academic writing compromises their academic success. Addressing this gap requires systematic pedagogical intervention, guided by theories of second

language acquisition (SLA), writing pedagogy, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

The teaching of academic writing in ESL contexts often oscillates between two extremes: traditional grammar-focused instruction and unstructured exposure to extended writing tasks. While the former emphasizes correctness at the expense of expression, the latter risks overwhelming students without providing the scaffolding necessary for success. Neither approach adequately addresses the cognitive and rhetorical demands of academic writing.

The central problem, therefore, is how to design pedagogical interventions that enable undergraduate ESL students to acquire academic writing skills systematically and effectively. This involves striking a balance between linguistic accuracy, rhetorical organization, and critical engagement, all while motivating students to view writing as a recursive and meaningful process rather than a burdensome requirement.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to develop a pedagogical framework for teaching academic writing that integrates product, process, and genre-based approaches, investigates the effectiveness of structured tasks (e.g., paraphrasing, summarizing, cohesion-building, hedging) in enhancing ESL learners' academic writing competence, provide insights into how English for Academic Purposes (EAP) can support undergraduate learners in mastering academic writing. Also, identify challenges and propose strategies for making academic writing less intimidating and more engaging for ESL learners.

Research Questions

Given below are some of the research questions which guide this study:

What is the significance of academic writing skills in undergraduate ESL education?

How can academic writing be taught systematically and practically to ESL learners?

What tasks and approaches most effectively improve ESL students' academic writing skills?

How can EAP frameworks be employed to scaffold the teaching of academic writing?

How can academic writing be made engaging and less burdensome for ESL learners?

Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this research lies in the recognition that academic writing is not a peripheral skill but a central determinant of academic success. ESL students often possess strong oral communication abilities but falter when

confronted with the demands of written academic discourse. This disconnect calls for pedagogical approaches that move beyond rote grammar instruction and isolated writing assignments.

By embedding writing instruction within the EAP tradition, this study emphasizes language as both a cognitive and social practice. The proposed framework integrates accuracy-focused drills, process-oriented activities, and genre-based awareness, thereby offering a holistic model that addresses linguistic, rhetorical, and pragmatic dimensions of writing. The dissertation-turned-study also underscores the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, acknowledging the influence of learners' first language and sociocultural background on their writing practices (Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 1996).

Organization of the paper

The paper traces the historical evolution of writing pedagogy, from product-oriented to process and genre-based approaches, highlighting their applicability to ESL contexts. The Research Methodology outlines the classroom-based tasks and pedagogical framework employed to teach academic writing at the undergraduate level. The Research finding presents evidence of how specific interventions impacted learners' writing performance. Finally, this paper interprets these findings in relation to SLA theory, EAP, and existing scholarship while synthesizing the study's contributions, limitations, and pedagogical implications.

Through this structure, the study aims not only to document the challenges of academic writing instruction in ESL contexts but also to propose actionable solutions that can be adapted across diverse higher education setting Language Strategies, Genre Awareness & Learner Perceptions

A recent study in Indonesia ("An investigation of English academic writing strategies employed by Indonesian graduate students in an English-medium instruction context", 2025) examined pre-writing, drafting, and post-writing strategies. Findings suggest that students rely heavily on drafting and revising, but struggle more with pre-writing (planning) especially when they do not have strong models of genre or disciplinary expectations. The study argues for scaffolding at all stages, especially genre modeling and peer discussion.

Complementing strategy studies, research on learner perceptions reveals attitudinal and affective challenges. For example, "ESL Academic Writing: Perceptions of Post-Graduate Learners of Arunachal Pradesh" (2023) indicates that postgraduate ESL students value academic writing skills but feel anxiety over evaluation, lack sufficient feedback, and believe that more exposure to academic reading would help their writing.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND KEY CONSTRUCTS

Genre theory (especially SFL) provides a strong theoretical basis in recent studies. It involves recognition of schematic structures (e.g., introduction, literature review, methods), move structure, discourse features (cohesion, modality, voice). Genre pedagogy helps demystify these for students. The combination of genre with process (process-genre) has been especially promising, because while genre gives form/function/context, process gives procedure and practice.

EAP (English for Academic Purposes) also features prominently in the literature. It is often the umbrella under which academic writing instruction is conducted, especially in non-native contexts. Recent studies emphasize not only linguistic competence but also rhetorical competence, disciplinary literacy, and academic socialization. For instance, integrating tasks that require students to engage with actual academic texts, peer review, and discipline-specific genres are shown to improve transfer of skills to domain courses. The Indonesian EMI study (2025) shows that strategy use increases when students are engaging in academic work in their subject disciplines. Even with these recent advancements there remain gaps. Undergraduate focus in non-elite / less-resourced institutions: Much of the research is at graduate level or in well-resourced universities. Less data exists for larger undergraduate ESL populations in regional universities (e.g., many in India) where class sizes are large, resources limited, and exposure to academic reading/writing is minimal prior to under graduation. Another gap exists in understanding. Students might understand genre features reasonably well in analysis tasks, but actual writing performance still shows deficits in coherence, academic register, citation, hedging, etc. Some studies conducted intensive interventions (e.g. small class, lots of feedback, technology tools) that may not be sustainable in regular university coursework. It is also the technology's double-edged nature which raises concerns around originality, dependence and whether students learn to self-monitor although tools like AI or writing software often promise immediate feedback. There also arises hindrance due to various Affective/ Motivational factors. For example, anxiety about writing, lack of confidence, fear of negative feedback, perceptions that academic writing is foreign. Some recent works explore perceptions, but fewer integrate effect with performance over time. There also exists a gap in terms of wide opportunities given to the students to perform academic tasks in the EAP courses as compared to other disciplines (e.g., science, engineering, humanities), where genre and discourse demands may differ significantly. Lastly Longitudinal studies are rare: We need more long-term tracking of how students improve with

genre/process interventions over multiple semesters or years, to understand retention, transfer, and whether improvements persist under real assessment conditions.

Indian higher education shares many of these challenges: large classes, limited exposure to academic writing in school, mixed proficiency levels, resource constraints. Recent Indian studies (e.g., ChatGPT intervention, research scholars' writing needs) reflect these same tensions: students often know what is expected (or believe they do), but struggle with how to deliver consistent academic writing in terms of coherence, register, citation, integration of sources, and revision practice.

Given that English is often taught as a subject rather than used as a medium in many disciplines, the disconnect between what is taught in general English/EAP vs. what is required in subject courses is sharp. Also, teacher training, assessment practices, and institutional support vary widely

Drawing all this together there is strong support in recent literature for integrated pedagogies combining product, process, genre, EAP methods, in multiple feedback cycles. Innovative tools (AI, writing software) are being explored but with caution due to issues of dependence and assessment integrity. Learner perceptions, strategies, and affect have been included in several studies, but few have fully woven them into interventions and outcome assessments. Thus, the gap this study aims to fill is to empirically test a robust pedagogical framework (process-genre + EAP + feedback cycles) in an Indian undergraduate ESL context (with perhaps large classes, mixed proficiency), focusing not only on writing performance (coherence, register, correctness) but also on strategies, perceptions, and sustainability. Also to Incorporate technology or supportive tools if possible and perhaps design tasks that align with students' disciplinary expectations. The study also aims to monitor outcomes over multiple drafts and tasks, to see whether improvements are stable and transferable.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a classroom-based intervention design situated within the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) tradition. The design was exploratory and pedagogically oriented, aiming to examine how a set of structured tasks could improve ESL undergraduates' academic writing skills. As writing development is a complex process that unfolds through recursive drafting, revision, and reflection, the intervention integrated process, genre, and accuracy-focused instruction into a unified framework. This design was appropriate because it allowed close observation of learners' progress within a naturalistic classroom

environment while maintaining systematic data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2018).

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in the Department of English at Aligarh Muslim University (India), a large public institution that attracts students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. English functions as the medium of instruction in many courses; however, most students come from schools where English exposure was limited or where grammar-translation methods predominated.

Participants were 60 undergraduate ESL students (32 female, 28 male), aged between 18 and 21. Their English proficiency ranged from lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate, as measured by a departmental placement test administered at the start of the semester. The group was selected because they were enrolled in a compulsory “Academic Writing” module designed to introduce them to essay writing, summarizing, paraphrasing, and source integration.

Participation in the research component of the course was voluntary. Students were informed that their work would be anonymized and used for research purposes only, and that opting out would not affect their grades. Forty-eight students (80%) consented to have their data included in the analysis.

Instructional Framework

The intervention was guided by an integrated process–genre approach. This approach sought to combine the recursive, student-centered activities of the process model with explicit instruction in the features of academic genres (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2007). The framework emphasized three interrelated dimensions: Accuracy and Language Control, Genre Awareness, process-oriented practice. To ensure accuracy and language control, students should engage in focused tasks targeting grammar, syntax, vocabulary, cohesion, and hedging strategies. This should be supported by building genre awareness through the analysis of model texts and guided practice in writing specific genres, such as summaries, argumentative essays, and short reports. Furthermore, a process-oriented approach provides recursive cycles of planning, drafting, receiving feedback, revising and editing to refine the final output.

Each weekly session followed a structured sequence that began with the presentation of model texts to highlight key features such as organization, transitions, citation and register. This was followed by guided practice involving collaborative activities, such as identifying topic sentences, cohesion markers, or hedging devices. Students then transitioned to task performance through individual or small group writing assignments, concluding with feedback and

revision cycles that incorporated peer review, teacher feedback and self-reflection.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Multiple data sources were collected to allow triangulation, including writing samples where students completed three major tasks during the semester: a baseline argumentative essay on a familiar topic to establish initial proficiency, a paraphrasing and summarizing exercise focused on integrating source material, and a final academic report requiring organization, use of evidence and accurate academic style. Additionally drafts and revisions were collected for each major task, with students producing at least two versions to track changes in organization, cohesion and accuracy. Peer and teacher feedback records were also archived, consisting of written feedback from both parties and oral feedback summarized in teacher logs. Finally, students completed reflective questionnaire at the end of the course to share their challenges and perceptions of the intervention.

To evaluate the data, both quantitative and qualitative methods were integrated through a rigorous process of triangulation to ensure the findings remain reliable and valid. Rubric-based scoring served as the primary quantitative measure, where writing samples were assessed across five dimensions- accuracy, cohesion, organization, academic style, and critical engagement- based on a rubric adapted from Hamp- Lyons and Kroll (1997) to track improvement between baseline and final tasks. This measurable evidence was complemented by a granular error analysis, which involved coding frequent grammatical and lexical mistakes to pinpoint persistent linguistic challenges. Furthermore, the qualitative depth of the study was captured through the thematic coding of student reflections, revealing learner perceptions of the intervention, alongside process tracking of drafts and revisions to document exactly how feedback and recursive drafting facilitated progress. By synthesizing these diverse sources, the analysis of effectively based objective performance trends with subjective learner experiences and the procedural evolution of the writing process.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE DESIGN

While the intervention provided rich insights, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize the findings. The study’s duration was limited to a single fourteen-week semester, which inherently restricted the ability to assess long- term retention of the skills acquired. Furthermore, as a single- site study, the findings may not generalize to all Indian or International ESL context where institutional resources and learner backgrounds vary significantly. Methodologically, although rubric-based

scoring provided a systematic framework, it may not have fully captured more nuanced improvements in rhetorical awareness or creativity. Additionally, because the researcher also served as the instructor, a potential risk of researcher bias existed, though this was carefully mitigated through data triangulation and the anonymization of student work. Despite these constraints, the research design remained highly suitable for capturing the developmental trajectories of ESL learners' academic writing within a real classroom environment, as the synthesis of quantitative rubric scores and qualitative reflections offered a comprehensive understanding of both learner progress and ongoing challenges.

V. FINDINGS

Analysis of rubric scores revealed a significant improvement in students' academic writing competence from the baseline essay to the final report. On a five-point scale, average scores for accuracy rose from 2.3 to 3.7, cohesion from 2.5 to 3.9, organization from 2.6 to 4.0, academic style from 2.4 to 3.8, and critical engagement from 2.1 to 3.5. These gains indicate that learners not only reduced grammatical and lexical errors but also developed stronger control over coherence, academic register, and the integration of sources. The greatest progress was observed in organization and cohesion, which were areas explicitly targeted through process genre tasks such as mind mapping, the use of transition markers, and peer review.

Regarding accuracy and error reduction, baseline essays displayed a high frequency of grammatical errors, especially in article usage, subject-verb-agreement, and tense consistency. For instance, an initial sentence such as , "Students face many problems in academic writing because the instructor could not give clear instructions," Lexical choice also improved, shifting from colloquial terms like "kids" and "stuff" to a more formal register including "children" and "materials", suggesting that explicit instruction in academic vocabulary and hedging devices had a measurable impact.

Students initially struggled to connect ideas logically across sentences and paragraphs, with many baseline essays resembling lists of points without transitions. However, with transition markers and peer feedback, final drafts displayed a smoother progression of ideas. Cohesion tasks, such as ordering jumbled sentences and practicing lexical chains, appeared to foster the ability to signal relationships like cause-effect and contrast. Similarly, the intervention's emphasis on genre modelling helped students move away from essays lacking clear structure towards reports with conventional thesis statements and topic sentences. One striking example involved a student who transitioned from

writing a single, unbroken paragraph to submitting a four-section report, illustrating how genre awareness can reshape a learner's conception of academic writing.

Another area of progress was the adoption of an appropriate academic style and the use of hedging. Initial drafts often contained a personal pronouns and categorical statements, such as "Writing is always difficult". After instruction, students began using cautious language, framing claims more tentatively by stating that writing "appears to be particularly challenging," which demonstrates a greater awareness of academic discourse conventions. While critical engagement with sources was more challenging, improvements were still evident. Students moved from verbatim copying without attribution to paraphrasing and citing appropriately, such as referencing Swales (1990). However, critical synthesis remained less developed than other skills, echoing literature that suggests source use is often the last skill to mature in L2 writing.

Students' perceptions, gathered through questionnaires and reflections, highlighted several key themes. Participants reported increased confidence, noting that breaking the writing process into manageable steps made the task feel less intimidating tool. However, students did face challenges with time management, as those accustomed to "one-shot" exam essays initially resisted the intensive drafting and revising process.

Despite these overall improvements, certain persistent challenges remained. Errors in articles and prepositions decreased but did not entirely disappear, and true synthesis of multiple sources remained a rare achievement among the cohort. Furthermore issues of cultural transfer occasionally reappeared, with some rhetorical patterns from the students' first languages- such as circular introduction or indirect thesis statements- suggesting deeper rhetorical habits that require more than a single semester to fully address.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results indicate that a process-genre intervention within an EAP framework can substantially improve undergraduate ESL learners' writing competence across dimensions of accuracy, cohesion, organization, and academic style. Gains were particularly strong in areas where tasks were explicit (e.g., transition markers, paraphrasing, hedging). However, more complex skills such as critical engagement with sources and sustained accuracy in articles/prepositions require longer-term scaffolding. Student reflections confirm that the intervention not only enhanced skills but also reduced writing anxiety, fostering greater confidence and autonomy.

The results of this classroom-based intervention provide compelling evidence that integrated process–genre pedagogy within an EAP framework can significantly enhance ESL undergraduates’ academic writing performance. Improvements in accuracy, cohesion, organization, and academic style align with previous studies that emphasize the value of combining recursive drafting with explicit genre awareness (Hyland, 2007; Badger & White, 2000). The findings also affirm that writing is not simply a linguistic activity but a socially situated practice that requires awareness of audience, purpose, and discourse conventions (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

A key outcome of this study was the marked growth in organization and cohesion, the two dimensions that showed the highest gains. This suggests that when students are guided through genre models, brainstorming, and the use of transition markers, they can begin to produce writing that approximates academic conventions more closely. The shift from list-like baseline essays to structured reports with clear introductions, body sections, and conclusions echoes findings from Xu and Li (2018), who demonstrated that explicit genre instruction helps Chinese EAP students adopt disciplinary conventions.

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