

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING TO EFL STUDENTS IN NON-PHILOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION: OBSTACLES AND PEDAGOGICAL SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Academic writing is a vital skill for higher education students, serving as the primary vehicle for research dissemination, international collaboration, and academic success. However, for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at non-philological institutions, such as Tashkent State Agrarian University, mastering academic writing in English presents a unique set of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural challenges. Traditional instruction often focuses on sentence-level grammar rather than macro-level discourse organization, leaving students unprepared for the demands of academic publishing. This article analyzes the primary obstacles EFL students face when producing academic texts, including first-language (L1) rhetorical transfer, lack of genre awareness, limited academic vocabulary, and high writing anxiety. It proposes practical pedagogical solutions, such as genre-based scaffolding, the integration of mentor texts from agricultural and technical fields, systematic teaching of academic stance, and process-oriented feedback. By implementing these active strategies, instructors can guide technical students toward producing logical, coherent, and internationally competitive academic texts.

Keywords

Academic Writing, EFL Students, Non-Philological Universities, Genre-Based Pedagogy, L1 Interference, Tashkent State Agrarian University, Scaffolding, Process Writing.

Introduction

In the modern academic landscape, English functions as the global lingua franca of scientific research, technical innovation, and international scholarship. For university students specializing in technical fields like agronomy, biotechnology, and agricultural economics, the ability to read international scientific papers is only half the battle. To actively participate in their global scientific communities, these students must also be able to write in English. Writing peer-reviewed articles, academic abstracts, research proposals, and reports has become an essential requirement for professional advancement and international recognition.

Despite its importance, academic writing is widely considered one of the most difficult language skills to acquire. Unlike conversational English, academic prose requires adherence to strict conventions of logic, structure, objectivity, and citation. For EFL students who have had minimal exposure to formal writing in secondary education, the transition to tertiary academic writing is often overwhelming. This transition is particularly challenging at non-philological universities, where curricula prioritize specialized subject knowledge, and English instruction is often limited in hours. Therefore, understanding the systematic challenges students face and establishing targeted, practical solutions is critical for university instructors.

Statement of the Problem

Instructors at technical and agricultural universities regularly encounter severe difficulties when preparing students to write academically in English. These challenges stem from several interconnected linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical factors:

1. **Rhetorical Differences and First-Language (L1) Transfer:** Every culture has its own rhetorical style for presenting arguments. Standard English academic writing is strictly linear, starting with a clear thesis statement and moving systematically through supporting evidence. In contrast, Uzbek and Russian writing styles often favor more circuitous, descriptive, or digressive structures, where the main argument is only revealed at the very end. When EFL students translate these native rhetorical patterns into English, their essays and abstracts appear disorganized, repetitive, or unfocused to international readers.

2. **Lack of Genre and Register Awareness:** Academic writing relies on a highly formal register and specific genres (such as abstracts, literature reviews, or research reports). Students often struggle to distinguish between informal spoken English and formal written prose. As a result, their academic texts frequently contain conversational vocabulary, emotional language, and inappropriate personal pronouns (such as "I believe" or "In my opinion") instead of objective passive structures, hedging strategies, and formal transitions.

3. **Limited Academic and Technical Vocabulary:** Technical and scientific writing demands a specialized lexicon, including both sub-technical academic words (e.g., *analyze, significant, correlation, empirical*) and field-specific jargon (e.g., *biotechnology, salinization, crop yield*). EFL students often suffer from lexical poverty, leading them to repeat the same basic verbs and nouns, which diminishes the academic quality and precision of their writing.

4. **Writing Anxiety and "Red-Pen" Feedback:** Writing is a highly demanding cognitive task that exposes a student's linguistic limitations. When instructors grade student writing by pointing out every single spelling, grammatical, and punctuation mistake with a red pen, they inadvertently increase the student's affective filter. High writing anxiety causes students to avoid complex sentence structures and vocabulary, resulting in safe, simplistic, and intellectually shallow texts.

Methodology and Solutions

This study employs a qualitative, pedagogical analysis designed to bridge the gap between academic writing theory and classroom reality at Tashkent State Agrarian University. By drawing upon contrastive rhetoric, genre analysis, and process-writing frameworks, the study examines the typical written outputs of agricultural EFL students. It identifies key problem areas and outlines a structured, step-by-step instructional model that addresses both local grammatical errors and global discourse organization.

Solutions

A. Implementing Genre-Based Scaffolding with Mentor Texts

To build genre awareness, instructors must move away from abstract grammar drills and instead expose students to authentic, high-quality examples of the specific genres they are expected to write.

- **The Solution in Practice:** If agro-ecology students are tasked with writing a research abstract, the instructor should first provide three or four real abstracts from reputable agricultural journals. Working in small groups, students analyze these "mentor texts" to map out their structural moves (e.g., background, purpose, methodology, results, and conclusion). By dissecting real academic prose, students learn how professional

researchers transition between ideas and establish their arguments. The instructor can then provide sentence starters and transition words (such as *Furthermore*, *Consequently*, *In contrast*, and *It is essential to note*) to scaffold the students' own writing process.

B. Direct Teaching of Academic Stance and Hedging

One of the defining features of academic writing is objectivity. EFL students must be taught how to express cautious claims and avoid over-generalizations, a linguistic technique known as "hedging."

- **The Solution in Practice:** Instructors should explicitly teach students to replace absolute, emotional statements with objective, tentative language. For example, instead of writing a subjective, absolute claim like, "Chemical fertilizers are terrible because they always ruin the soil," students should be trained to write, "Excessive use of chemical fertilizers may lead to gradual soil degradation over time." Teaching students to use modal verbs (e.g., *may*, *might*, *could*), tentative verbs (e.g., *suggest*, *indicate*, *appear*), and cautious adverbs (e.g., *potentially*, *generally*, *relatively*) drastically improves the scholarly tone and scientific validity of their work.

C. Transitioning to a Process-Oriented Writing Approach

Writing is not a single, spontaneous event, but a multi-stage process of planning, drafting, reviewing, and editing. Instructors must restructure their assignments to guide students through this journey.

- **The Solution in Practice:** Rather than asking students to write an academic paper at home and submit it for a final grade, the writing process should be integrated directly into the classroom.
 1. During the *Pre-writing stage*, students brainstorm agricultural topics and organize their main ideas using simple bulleted outlines.
 2. In the *Drafting stage*, they focus purely on putting their ideas on paper without worrying about perfect spelling or grammar.
 3. In the *Peer-review stage*, students exchange drafts with classmates to check for clear organization, logical transitions, and thesis strength.
 4. Finally, in the *Editing stage*, they refine their grammar, vocabulary, and formatting. This structured process reduces writing anxiety by showing students that excellent writing is built through iteration.

D. Shifting Feedback from Correction to Coaching

To lower writing anxiety, instructors must change how they evaluate student writing, prioritizing content, logic, and organization over minor grammar errors.

- **The Solution in Practice:** When grading drafts, teachers should use a selective feedback strategy. Instead of correcting every mistake, they should focus first on "global errors" (e.g., weak thesis statement, poor paragraph transitions, lack of scientific evidence). Comment on these macro-level issues using constructive, encouraging notes in the margins, such as "Excellent example here, but how does it connect to your main thesis?" Local grammatical issues (such as subject-verb agreement or article usage) should only be addressed in the final draft. This coaching approach encourages students to focus on deep, intellectual communication rather than safe, basic sentences.

Conclusion

Teaching academic writing to EFL students at non-philological universities is a challenging but vital task. To help students overcome linguistic and rhetorical barriers, instructors must shift their focus from mechanical grammar exercises to holistic, genre-based, and process-oriented writing instruction. By utilizing authentic mentor texts, teaching academic hedging, supporting collaborative peer review, and offering constructive coaching feedback, educators can

systematically dismantle writing anxiety and build student confidence. At Tashkent State Agrarian University, this transition in pedagogy equips agricultural and technical students with the precise, logical, and formal writing skills required to publish their research, secure international grants, and successfully represent the Uzbek scientific community on the world stage.

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