

EXPLORING KAZAKHSTANI UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC
WRITING CHALLENGES

**Exploring Kazakhstani Undergraduate Students' Academic Writing Challenges at an
EMI University: A Qualitative Inquiry**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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15th October 2021

Dear Arailym Ablazimova,

This letter now confirms that your research project entitled:
**Exploring Kazakhstani Undergraduate Students' Academic Writing
Challenges at an EMI University: A Qualitative Inquiry_**
has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of
Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing
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Yours sincerely,

Sulushash Kerimkulova



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Abstract

Exploring Kazakhstani Undergraduate Students' Academic Writing Challenges at an EMI University: A Qualitative Inquiry

With academic writing in universities with English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is becoming increasingly prevalent internationally, students with different first languages sometimes struggle with this type of writing. Although several studies have investigated the academic writing difficulties encountered by international students, little or no research has examined the academic writing challenges faced by Kazakhstani undergraduate students. Thus, the current study has examined the academic writing experiences of Kazakhstani undergraduate students enrolled at an EMI university in relation to their academic writing challenges, the factors that cause their challenges, and the strategies they use to overcome them. A qualitative case study design employing semi-structured interviews was adopted for this research. Ten first-year undergraduate students majoring in humanities at one Kazakhstani EMI university participated in this study. The findings indicate that their academic writing challenges are caused by inadequacies in vocabulary, developing an argument, and grammar and formatting. This study also revealed several factors that are believed to cause these difficulties. These are insufficient prior language learning experiences and students' insufficient interaction as writers with their instructors and lack of guidance. To address these challenges, students pointed to several remedial strategies including expanding their vocabulary, brainstorming, planning and organizing ideas, abandoning online dictionaries, good academic preparation, using IELTS writing structures, conducting peer feedback, and working with their instructor's feedback that enable them to overcome their academic writing

difficulties. The findings of this research could contribute to the body of literature by addressing the gaps in previous academic writing challenges studies by focusing on students in Kazakhstan. It may also generate interest among scholars for further research in the field of EMI and encourage policymakers and educators to focus on the importance of academic writing in schools and to consider employing more native English speakers for academic writing classes.

Аңдатпа

Ағылшын тілі оқыту құралы ретінде қолданылатын университетінде қазақстандық студенттердің академиялық жазу мәселелерін зерттеу: сапалы сауалнама

Ағылшын тілінде оқу құралы (EMI) бар университеттерде академиялық жазу халықаралық деңгейде кең таралып жатқандықтан, әр түрлі тілдегі студенттер кейде жазудың бұл түрімен күреседі. Бірнеше зерттеулер халықаралық студенттер кездесетін академиялық жазу қиындықтарын зерттегенімен, қазақстандық бакалавриат студенттері кездесетін академиялық жазу қиындықтарын зерттеу аз немесе мүлдем зерттелген жоқ. Осылайша, осы зерттеу ағылшын тілі оқыту құралы ретінде қолданылатын университетінде оқитын Қазақстандық бакалавриат студенттерінің академиялық жазу тәжірибесін олардың академиялық жазу қиындықтарына, олардың қиындықтарын тудыратын факторларға және оларды жеңу үшін қолданатын стратегияларына байланысты зерттеді. Бұл зерттеу үшін жартылай құрылымдық сұхбаттарды қолданатын сапалы кейс-стади дизайны қабылданды. Бұл зерттеуге бір қазақстандық EMI университетінің гуманитарлық ғылымдар мамандығы бойынша бакалавриат курсының он бірінші курс студенті қатысты. Нәтижелер олардың академиялық жазу қиындықтары сөздік қорының жеткіліксіздігінен, дәлелді дамытудан, грамматика мен пішімдеуден туындағанын көрсетеді. Бұл зерттеу сонымен қатар осы қиындықтарды тудыратын бірнеше факторларды анықтады. Бұл алдыңғы тіл үйрену тәжірибесінің жеткіліксіздігі және студенттердің жазушы ретінде өз нұсқаушыларымен жеткіліксіз қарым-қатынасы және жеткілікті деңгейде қолдаудың болмауы. Осы қиындықтарды шешу үшін студенттер сөздік қорын кеңейту, миға шабуыл, идеяларды жоспарлау және

ұйымдастыру, онлайн сөздіктерден бас тарту, жақсы академиялық дайындық, IELTS жазу құрылымдарын пайдалану, құрдастарымен кері байланыс жүргізу және оқытушының кері байланысымен жұмыс істеу сияқты бірнеше түзету стратегияларына назар аударды. Бұл зерттеудің нәтижелері Қазақстандағы студенттерге назар аудару арқылы бұрынғы академиялық жазу мәселелерін зерттеудегі олқылықтарды жою арқылы әдебиеттер жиынтығына ықпал ете алады. Ол сондай-ақ ЕМІ саласындағы зерттеулерге ғалымдардың қызығушылығын тудыруы мүмкін және саясаткерлер мен педагогтарды мектептердегі академиялық жазудың маңыздылығына назар аударуға және академиялық жазу сабақтарына көбірек ағылшын тілінде сөйлейтіндерді пайдалануды қарастыруға шақыруы мүмкін.

Аннотация

Изучение проблем, связанных с использованием академической письменной речи среди казахстанских студентов-бакалавров, учащихся в университете с английским языком обучения

В связи с тем, что навыки академической письменной речи в университетах с английским языком обучения (EMI) становятся все более востребованными на международном уровне, студенты, для которых английский не является родным языком, иногда испытывают трудности с вышеупомянутым навыком. Несмотря на то, что в нескольких исследованиях изучались трудности, с которыми сталкиваются иностранные студенты при использовании академической письменной речи, проблемы употребления навыков академического письма среди казахстанских студентов-бакалавров остаются мало изученными. Таким образом, в настоящем исследовании изучался опыт навыков академического письма казахстанских студентов-бакалавров, зачисленных в университет с английским языком обучения в соотношении с трудностями употребления академической письменной речи, а также, факторов, вызывающих данные затруднения, и стратегии, которые студенты используют для их преодоления. Для данного исследования был использован качественный метод исследования с использованием полуструктурированных интервью. В исследовании приняли участие десять студентов-бакалавров первого курса, обучающихся по специальности «Гуманитарные науки» в одном из казахстанских университетов с английским языком обучения. Результаты показывают, что проблемы использования академической письменной речи, связаны с недостаточным уровнем словарного запаса учащихся, навыков повествования, употребления грамматики и форматирования.

Данное исследование также выявило несколько факторов, которые, как полагается, вызывают эти трудности: предыдущий низкий уровень изучения языка и недостаточное вовлечение студентов в письменные виды деятельности, а также отсутствие обратной связи. Для решения этих проблем, учащиеся указали на несколько корректирующих стратегий, таких как расширение словарного запаса, использование мозгового штурма, планирование и организацию идей, отказ от онлайн-словарей, качественную академическую подготовку, использование письменных структур IELTS, получение обратной связи от одногруппников и преподавателя, который оказывает им помощь в преодолении трудностей с академическим письмом. Результаты этого исследования могут внести вклад в литературу, восполнив пробелы в предыдущих исследованиях, занимающихся изучением проблем навыков академического письма среди казахстанских студентов. Помимо этого, результаты могут заинтересовать ученых для дальнейшего изучения проблем в сфере английского как основного языка обучения, мотивировать политиков и преподавателей уделить особое внимание навыкам академической письменной речи в школах и рассмотреть возможность найма большего числа носителей английского языка для обучения навыкам академического письма.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background Information

The global expansion of English as a medium instruction (EMI) in higher education over the world has contributed to an increase in multilingual students writing their academic assignments in English as part of their degree programs. Sommers and Saltz (2004) pointed out that many non-native English-speaking students face an array of challenges when completing academic writing assignments in English. This is because writing is regarded as one of the most important skills for students to master since they are required to express their thoughts with grammatical accuracy. This point was articulated by Singleton-Jackson and Colella (2012), stating that “the ability to write clearly and fluently is undoubtedly one of the more important skills required of graduates” since it denotes their academic development (p. 24). The present chapter provides background information on academic writing and its importance, and then points to some of the academic writing challenges students might face. It also depicts the problem statement and purpose, research questions, and the significance of the study.

Academic writing is considered to be an essential communication resource for the transfer of knowledge in all fields of study. In higher education institutions, academic writing is crucial to the construction of knowledge within disciplines and to the professional development of students (Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2018). Thus, universities worldwide strive for their students to master academic writing skills. Paltridge and Starfield (2020) note that there is an increasing number of students who “have enrolled in masters and doctoral studies in their home countries where the language of the doctorate will be English even though

English is not the national language of that country” (p. 24). According to Al Fadda (2012), academic writing can be defined as a mental and cognitive activity, as it is created and produced in our minds. However, despite being a crucial skill to acquire, especially at the university level, Singleton-Jackson and Colella (2012) claim that this writing skill is not always successfully developed. Many students find writing quality papers for written assignments, including essays, quite challenging. Non-native English-speaking students, in particular, might face difficulties with academic writing (Negari, 2012).

Typically, students entering universities are required to possess academic study skills, particularly academic writing skills. However, previous research indicates that many students encounter specific academic writing challenges, such as poor grammar, a lack of academic writing mastery, and an inability to utilize academic writing to create social identities when studying at the university level (Pineteh, 2014). This might be because, in many educational organizations, students are required to provide “good writing texts in the form of essays, assignments, term papers, or dissertations” (Al-Badwawi, 2011, p.2). Additionally, academic writing in most academic courses in higher education is a difficult skill to master because it requires both high language proficiency (linguistic) and content knowledge (disciplinary) (Al-Badwawi, 2011).

The academic writing challenges of students studying in a second language in many foreign countries are well-documented in the existing literature (Al-Badwawi, 2011; Al Fadda, 2012; Kalikokha et al., 2009). These studies point out to several possible factors that affect students' academic writing challenges. These challenges include problems with working independently, understanding time management, lacking adequate knowledge about academic

writing conventions, and demonstrating critical thinking in their written assignments. However, few empirical studies in Kazakhstan have focused on the academic writing challenges faced by university students within EMI universities in Kazakhstan (e.g. Hajar & Si Mhamed, 2021). Thus, this research focuses on investigating undergraduate university students' perceptions of the academic writing challenges they face and how they address them while studying through the medium of English.

Problem Statement

Learning English as a second or foreign language is a difficult process that demands the acquisition of a range of skills. These challenges could vary among learners with varying first languages and previous academic backgrounds. In the context of Kazakhstan, the challenges students experience could be directly linked to the type of instruction they received in schools, specifically in mainstream schools with languages of instruction other than English, for example schools with Kazakh or Russian as a medium of instruction. Generally, in comparison to native speakers of the English language, English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners might have fewer academic writing skills, which could be a predictor of the various challenges that are encountered. In this regard, Al-Fadda (2012) claims that learners who wish to write in a second language (L2) should have proficiency in writing in their native language. Moreover, Cumming's (1990) study revealed that the acquisition of writing skills in the first language (L1) assists learners' L2 writing. As is evident from the academic writing literature, several language researchers have explored undergraduate students' academic writing challenges (Akhtar et al., 2019; Gonye et al., 2012; Pineteh, 2014). Another component involved in enhancing one's skill in English academic writing is the strategies that are employed to surmount the challenges that present themselves

to learners. In this regard, students with different proficiency levels tend to use various strategies in their learning process (Alkubaidi, 2014).

For many Kazakhstani undergraduate students, the acquisition of formal academic writing is a complex and challenging process. This is because academic writing in English at advanced levels is “a challenge even for most native English speakers” (Al Fadda, 2012, p. 123). An understanding of these challenges can help students by ensuring they have access to relevant support for the duration of their studies. Accordingly, revealing these challenges and the strategies used by the students to address them can be insightful to other Kazakhstani university students as well as their academic writing instructors and to policymakers in relation to the implementation of EMI in formal settings in Kazakhstan. However, to the best of the author’s knowledge, other than Amirova's (2020) research work on students’ perceptions and experiences of academic Kazakh in a Kazakhstani EMI university, and Hajar and Si Mhamed’s (2021) study on the challenges and strategy use of Kazakhstani students working on their master’s thesis projects in the same Kazakhstani EMI university very little previous research has directly addressed undergraduate students’ experiences regarding their academic writing challenges and strategy uses at an EMI university in Kazakhstan. Therefore, the present study intends to fill this gap in research within the context of Kazakhstan and to provide new empirical data that will contribute to the literature on the topic, as well as to higher education in relation to the methods that can be used to teach writing, and students’ acquisition of writing skills.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of the first-year undergraduate

students regarding their academic writing challenges at an EMI university through their perceptions, the factors that cause these challenges, and the strategies used for coping with them. Additionally, this study aims to explore the differences in students' perceptions of these challenges in relation to their different language learning backgrounds. With this in mind, the researcher seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the academic writing challenges faced by undergraduate students at an EMI university in Kazakhstan as perceived by them?
2. What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges?
3. How do students cope with these challenges?

To provide answers to support the research aim and correspond to the research questions, interview-based qualitative research was conducted in an EMI university in Kazakhstan where students might encounter academic writing challenges.

Significance of the Study

This research could benefit such stakeholders as faculty, students, university administrators, and potential applicants willing to study through EMI.

Firstly, the research results can benefit faculty by identifying the academic writing challenges of their students and providing some assistance in finding strategies to solve these issues. Secondly, the data could allow these Kazakhstani undergraduate students studying through EMI to reflect on and better understand their challenges and strategies to improve their academic writing skills. Additionally, university administrators could gain a better understanding of Kazakhstani university students' academic writing experiences and objectives in terms of their expectations, aspirations, various difficulties, and the strategies they deploy to deal with these difficulties. This, in turn, may encourage these social actors

(i.e., faculty and administrators) to revise their practices for supporting these students, especially with regards to the support they offer for the development of their competence in academic English. Lastly, this study could enable potential applicants to apply to EMI programs and universities by increasing their understanding of the possible issues they might face in the future if they decide to enter such programs.

This empirical study will also contribute to the body of literature devoted to the academic writing challenges of students studying through EMI worldwide. In particular, it would assist in the further advancement of knowledge in the field and could help provide a point of comparison to other international contexts. In addition, since little research has been conducted on undergraduate students' academic writing challenges in the context of Kazakhstan, this study could be an initial step toward identifying the challenges of EMI undergraduate students and investigating how they address those problems.

Outline of the Study

The thesis structurally falls into six chapters, followed by references and appendices. This introductory chapter provides an overview of the background information about the chosen research topic and presents the problem statement, research purpose, research questions, and significance of the study. In the second chapter, the literature review, the relevant literature on EMI, academic writing, and academic writing challenges is examined. This is followed by the third chapter, which presents the methodology used in this research, including the research design, research site, sampling, data collection instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The fourth chapter provides the main findings of this research, and is followed by the fifth chapter, a discussion of these

findings with reference to the literature review. Finally, the main conclusion of the study is drawn, along with its limitations and some recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The previous chapter focused on delineating the background information about academic challenges, particularly academic writing challenges encountered by students writing through English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), and the importance of considering these issues in the Kazakhstani context. This chapter presented the literature review, which aims to analyze the theoretical framework used for this study and provided a review of the existing literature on undergraduate students' perceptions of challenges while studying through EMI. To gain an understanding of the challenges faced by students striving to acquire academic writing skills in the English language in an EMI university, and the reasons for these challenges, as well as to highlight the strategies they use to address their specific difficulties, the following questions have been addressed:

1. What are the academic writing challenges faced by undergraduate students at an EMI university in Kazakhstan as perceived by them?
2. What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges?
3. How do students cope with these challenges?

The chapter starts with a discussion of the key concepts of the study. Secondly, the challenges of undergraduate students studying through EMI are highlighted. The third section examines the literature that highlights academic writing challenges, their types, and the factors that cause the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students. Next, in order to conceptualize the study and build a theoretical basis, the chapter presents the theoretical framework that was used in the study along with a detailed description of its components and

its relevance to writing in a second language. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarizing the key ideas and arguments of the chapter.

Key Concepts

In order to build a foundation for discussing the literature and to establish a theoretical context, this section provides an analysis of the key concepts that have been important for this study. It starts with the concept of EMI, focusing on EMI both internationally and in Kazakhstan, followed by the concepts of perceptions and academic writing.

The Concept of EMI

This section discusses the concept of EMI based on the analysis of the definitions and usage of this concept in the existing literature. It is noteworthy that the notion of EMI is an important term for this research since its main focus is the perceptions of undergraduate students at an EMI university.

Several studies have shown that using a foreign language (English) to deliver subject content is labeled differently including terms such as EMI (Dimova et al., 2015; Doiz et al., 2012), English as a lingua franca in academia (ELFA) (Jenkins, 2014), ILCHE or integrating content and language in higher education (Costa & Coleman, 2010), and CLIL or content and language integrated learning (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Smit & Dafouz, 2012). Even though EMI is usually used interchangeably with very similar concepts, some scholars perceive it as an umbrella term that covers all of these notions. One of the main differences between EMI and ELFA as opposed to CLIL and ILCHE is that the latter two are dual-focused: on teaching content and language simultaneously. On the contrary, EMI is not focused on language learning, but rather accentuates teaching subject content.

Since EMI is a relatively new concept, there are numerous definitions of this term that have been provided by different scholars. A widespread definition of the EMI concept is presented by Dearden (2014) as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English” (p.4). According to Dearden (2014), this definition is significant as it separates the concepts of CLIL and EMI. In this regard, one of the distinctions between these two phenomena is that EMI is a concept used worldwide, while CLIL originated from the European context and was explicitly focused on secondary education (Dearden, 2014). Similarly, EMI is defined as "providing teaching content in languages other than the language spoken by students" (Costa & Coleman, 2013; Macaro et al., 2018).

Indeed, teaching content through a second or other language is becoming a trend in all stages of education from pre-school to the tertiary levels (Macaro et al., 2018). Yet, despite this overarching trend, it is believed that EMI is primarily applicable to tertiary education (Macaro et al., 2018; Schmidt-Unterberger, 2018). This concept concerning tertiary education aims to focus not on a concentration on the dual focus of CLIL, but mainly on comprehending the content within the subject (Jarvinen, 2008). Thus, it could be concluded that EMI is the most applicable term considering its implementation in tertiary education and its focus on subject knowledge. Therefore, the definition provided by Dearden (2014) is used in this research study since the EMI is content-driven and English is used as an instrument to deliver the content of academic courses rather than to help students improve their language skills (Macaro, 2018; Polenova, 2016; Zhao & Dixon, 2017).

EMI around the World

EMI is becoming a global phenomenon in many countries; most scholars believe that globalization and internationalization policies are considered to be the main reasons for the implementation of EMI (Wachter & Maiworm, 2014; Walkinshaw et al., 2017). Similarly, other scholars have emphasized the present objective to internationalize higher education (HE) (Airey et al., 2017; Albach & Knight, 2007; Dearden, 2014; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). Thus, the growing number of EMI programs in HE should be understood within the global spread of “internationalization”, where Altbach and Knight (2007) define internationalization as “the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment” (p. 290-291). In this regard, Tadaki (2013) defines internationalization as “the mantra of higher education” (para 1).

Initially, the development of EMI began in Europe; between 2001 and 2004 there was a tremendous increase in EMI programs in European universities (Wachter & Maiworm, 2014). The highest number of universities offering EMI programs by country are in the Netherlands (1,078 programs), followed by Germany (1,030), Sweden (882), France (499), and Denmark (494) (Wachter & Maiworm, 2014, p.16). Moreover, many universities have found EMI to be crucial within the European context (Tamtam et al., 2012) for several reasons such as internationalization, the attraction of international students, student exchanges, and employment opportunities for local students (Ammon & McConnell, 2002). Subsequently, EMI has gained importance and popularity worldwide (Galloway et al., 2017).

A similar growth of EMI implementation in HE has been observed in Asian countries. Dearden's (2014) report represented the data regarding the implementation of EMI in non-English speaking countries; this report highlighted the fact that EMI had been increasingly

implemented both in public and private educational organizations in the overwhelming majority of Asian countries. In this regard, private universities were the predecessors of EMI implementation in Asia (Phan, 2013). For example, one of the most important vehicles for Singapore's economic development might be the internationalization of HE in Singapore (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). Moreover, Dearden's (2014) report revealed that EMI is not only being used in HE but also in primary and secondary schools where EMI is being increasingly implemented within the Asian context. Malaysia was one of those Asian countries that started in this way by implementing HE and continuing with this implementation in primary and secondary schools, mostly in science and mathematics (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). Other countries that have followed Malaysia in adopting policies regarding EMI implementation at all educational levels are Nepal, Indonesia, Taiwan, and China (Dearden, 2014).

The information discussed above shows that EMI is rapidly growing worldwide; however, the most incredible spread is seen mainly in Europe and non-English speaking Asian countries. One such country is Kazakhstan, which is covered in the next sub-section.

EMI in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is one of the countries that has been striving to implement learning through the English language within its educational system over the past decade. This is because of the government's recognition of its importance in the country's development (Zhetpisbayeva et al., 2016). In Kazakhstan, English started to be taught as a foreign language in 1990; however, EMI was not implemented until the beginning of 2000 (Gerfanova, 2018). The initial implementation of EMI was presented in a cultural project called "Trinity of Languages" which aims towards training a highly educated cadre (Zhumagulova & Astafyeva, 2010). In a similar vein, the first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, initiated the

“Kazakhstan-2050” strategy, to join the thirty most developed countries in the world (Nazarbayev, 2012). Additionally, another reason EMI has been disseminated in Kazakhstan is the signing of the Bologna Process in 2010, which later resulted in the entrance of Kazakhstan into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Seitzhanova et al., 2015). Moreover, becoming a member of the Bologna Process, provided an opportunity for Kazakhstani higher education institutions to benefit from their cooperation with international partners (Turumbetova, 2014) through the development of multilingual education programs with the stipulation that students master the English language, along with the Kazakh and Russian languages (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016). Thus, teaching in English (EMI) became popular in Kazakhstani secondary and higher educational systems after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In this regard, the first president, in his address “New Kazakhstan in a new world”, introduced the trilingual policy (Nazarbayev, 2007). The main purpose of this policy is to create a multilingual generation who can speak fluently in three languages, acquire science subjects through three languages, and have effective communication skills in a variety of social and economic spheres (AEO NIS, 2013). To ensure the successful implementation of the trilingual policy according to the decree of the former president, Nazarbayev, the following programs were launched: The State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 (2010), The State Program of Education and Science Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016- 2019 (2016), The National Plan 100 Concrete Steps (2015) and The Road Map for Trilingual Policy 2015-2020 (2015). As it was stated in the Standard Subject Plan for 2012-2013, all Kazakhstani schools are to provide teaching in all three languages with no exception (MoES, 2013b). Since Nazarbayev

Intellectual Schools (NIS) were created as innovative schools for possible changes, they have piloted the trilingual policy and other educational reforms with the aim of transferring them to other mainstream schools (Shamshidinova et al., 2014).

Since the implementation of the Trilingual Education Policy, few changes have been made in curricula to include English as the medium of instruction for science subjects. According to the State Program for Education and Science Development 2016- 2019 (2016), STEM subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Computer Science were planned to be increasingly taught in English from 2017 to 2023 (SPESD, 2016). With the aim of experimenting with the trilingual policy, the first NIS was opened in 2008 (AEO NIS 2013, 3). Based on the language policies of NIS (NIS AEO, 2019), second or foreign language acquisition is conducted with a “switching” strategy. This means that in seventh grade, only 30%, and in ninth grade, 50% of lessons are conducted through the English language. All subjects are taught in the English language in both the 11th and 12th grades. According to the switching strategy, teachers should follow the “one teacher-one language” approach, but they can also speak in Kazakh or Russian based on students’ needs (NIS AEO, 2019, p. 3). Moreover, in the transfer of this educational policy to all mainstream schools in Kazakhstan, some other schools, such as Bilim Innovation Lyceums, and Daryn schools for gifted students, have successfully implemented EMI. Along with EMI being implemented in school systems, Kazakhstan seeks to internationalize higher education and implement EMI at several universities across the country (Goodman & Montgomery, 2020). According to Karabassova (2020), more than 40 out of the 125 universities in Kazakhstan included EMI programs and this number is continuing to increase. Furthermore, the list of HEIs in Kazakhstan that deliver academic programs entirely in English includes Nazarbayev University (NU), KIMEP

(formerly: Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics, and Strategic Research), Suleyman Demirel University (SDU), Kazakh-American University, Kazakhstan-British Technical University (KBTU), Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages (KUIRW), University of International Business (UIB), and International Academy of Business (IAB) (Zenkova & Khamitova, 2018).

The Concept of Perceptions

The current section illustrates the concept of perception, since the central focus of the present study is to explore the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students at an EMI university through their own perceptions. There are various explanations and descriptions of this concept. From the psychological perspective, the term perception is associated with “feelings, beliefs, experiences, preferences, mental images, values, concepts, heuristics, stereotypes, and knowledge (amongst others)” (Herrera, 2015, p.109). In her work, Herrera utilizes Da Silva’s explanation that perception is “a physical and intellectual ability used in mental processes to recognize, interpret, and understand events” (Da Silva, 2005, as cited in Herrera, 2015, p. 109). This particular definition also suits the purpose of this study regarding academic writing challenges. Similarly, Clopper et al. (2012) stated that perception is the ability of a person to distinguish, realize and judge the actions around them. Hence, mental skills affect the way people think and react.

Furthermore, this term can be defined from a pedagogical point of view (Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2013; Yardakul, 2015). According to Yardakul (2015), perception is linked to pedagogy and can be explained as “attributing meanings” to causes occurring externally (p.126). The internal process of new concept acquisition by cooperating with background knowledge and previous experience can be considered as part of the attribution mentioned

above (Yardakul, 2015). Furthermore, even from a pedagogical perspective, the explanation of the term perception is rooted in psychology.

Even though the term perception is analyzed from two different perspectives, the meanings are only slightly different. Thus, Da Silva's definition in Herrera's (2015) work has been found as the most appropriate for the purpose of this study.

The Concept of Academic Writing

Even though the concept of academic writing has been explored by many scholars, there are very few specific definitions that demonstrate the essence of this term. Employing an accurate definition of the term would be helpful to research undertaken on the topic as it would help to delimit the nature of academic writing in general as well as the specific approach needed for students to acquire this skill. Hence, a researcher could better focus on aspects of this issue to highlight possible issues and solutions that may arise. One definition of academic writing is given by Tardy (2005) as a "transformation of knowledge that involves convincing readers of the value, significance, and credibility of one's work" (p. 325). Moreover, academic writing can be defined as the written scientific discourses that scientists produce in accordance with the conventions and expectations of their respective disciplines (Milson-Whyte, 2015). Another description of academic writing is stated as: "the style of writing found in academic and scholarly journals in education, dissertations and master's theses and other professional publications in education" (Kemp, 2007, p. 9). In this particular study, the definition provided by Kemp (2007) will be used since it best suits its purpose.

Academic writing is highly emphasized in higher education, since learning is believed to be carried out through the written language (Hyland, 2006). It is essential to highlight that there are numerous benefits of academic writing for learners, such as improving their

productive writing abilities and providing them the opportunity for self-expression in the target language, which will strengthen their creativity skills in general, and their communication abilities in particular (Tarnopolsky & Kozhushko, 2007). Besides, academic writing is an essential skill that is associated with language, among other important literacy practices, which students are expected to acquire to succeed in their tertiary educational studies (Krause, 2001; Leki & Carson, 1994; Lillis, 2001; Zhu, 2004). At the same time, it is challenging to master academic writing since it requires a knowledge of both the subject matter and language (Al-Badwawi, 2011). Learning academic writing is especially taxing at the tertiary level, since it is the first time first-year undergraduate students are expected to produce such large pieces of writing based on their research and pre-existing literature, so this can be confusing and frustrating (Al-Badwawi, 2011). From their study of first-year Malawian students' perceptions of essay writing, Kalikokha et al. (2009) found that students encountered several difficulties, including those related to paraphrasing, summarizing, utilizing a suitable writing style and academic vocabulary, and finding a sufficient number of appropriate sources. In this regard, Al Fadda (2012) stated that "writing style, motivation, anxiety, over-expression, writer's block, and other emotional factors" could be possible reasons for such difficulties (p.123).

From all the analysis presented above, it can be concluded that academic writing is one of the essential skills students should have in tertiary level education. In contrast to other language skills, it is challenging to acquire academic writing skills because it demands both disciplinary and linguistic knowledge. Hence, students might encounter difficulties while endeavoring to write academically in their first year of study. These difficulties could be due to various reasons such as a lack of motivation or an inappropriate writing style, or some

emotional factors (Kalikokha et al., 2009). In the following sections, there will be an analysis of some challenges encountered by students, particularly academic writing challenges, and the factors that cause these challenges.

Academic Writing Challenges

Writing is a difficult language skill to master since it is a combination of various mental productions that demands learners' concentration, the accuracy of their ideas, and discipline (Grami, 2010). Writing in a second or foreign language has been one of the most significant concerns, especially for English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) learner, at the university level. In this regard, a considerable number of the studies conducted in the scope of ESL and EFL state that university students face several difficulties studying English in general and writing in particular (Bacha, 2012; Khalil, 2002; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1997; Tahaineh, 2010), and many scholars have found academic writing to be one of the most challenging skills for EFL and ESL learners (Al Badi, 2015; Ansari, 2012; Mohan & Lo, 1985).

Hence, this section focuses on international studies that have discussed the academic writing challenges that undergraduate students encounter while writing their assignments and dissertations.

Lack of Academic Vocabulary

Academic vocabulary is common to a wide range of academic texts. Moreover, vocabulary is the core component of any language, including English; thus, people cannot successfully share their thoughts and communicate in oral and written form without vocabulary (Alharbi, 2017). ESL/EFL students have to use the following vocabulary in an academic writing class: subject-related vocabulary in scientific activities (e.g., decrease,

current, change, etc.), scientific activities (e.g., surveys, analyses, etc.), and linguistic acts (e.g., to argue, state, examine) (Salager-Meyer, 1990). Moreover, it has been highlighted in some studies that it might be problematic for EFL/ESL students to not have a sufficient amount of academic vocabulary in their writing (Paynter et al., 2006; Song, 2002).

Issues with Using Citations and Referencing

Academic writing requires students to utilize sources properly; thus, it is crucial that they remember this while writing. This section lists and analyzes the challenges of source usage in academic writing, including plagiarism issues, citation, and referencing.

Plagiarism. According to Park (2003), plagiarism is "the theft of words or ideas, beyond what would normally be regarded as general knowledge" (p. 472). Thus, plagiarism generally refers to the exact duplication of an original writer's words. Similarly, this term was defined as a "type of intellectual theft. It can take many forms, from deliberate cheating to accidentally copying from a source without acknowledgment" (Anderson, 2009, p. 1). Even though the issue of plagiarism has been increasingly prevalent in recent years, some learners still have misconceptions about the meaning of this term. In this respect, it has been stated that students do not believe they are plagiarizing someone else's words and ideas if they cite the author's name (Harris, 2001); thus, they cannot recognize the plagiarism in their work (Harris, 2001; Hyland 2001).

Citation and Referencing. Hyland (1999) defined citation as a rhetorical peculiarity that is "central to the social context of persuasion" (p. 342). Therefore, it is worth noting that using citations appropriately is critical, especially in academic writing. However, most students encounter problems in citation use while writing academic texts for the first time (Borg, 2000), since learners should unify their arguments with the statements of other

academics. As a result, plagiarism or miscommunication issue could appear because of the incorrect citation of data from a particular source (Yugianingrum, 2008) or the misinterpretation of an author's statement (Groom, 2000).

Referencing is another concern EFL students may have with the academic writing process. They are required to use an appropriate referencing format (e.g., APA, Harvard, or IEEE) based on the requirements of their universities. There are, in fact, two reasons why researchers have explained that referencing is crucial: firstly, it helps to identify the author of one particular idea (Neville, 2008), and secondly, it provides the opportunity for the readers to familiarize themselves with other relevant literature that will assist them in finding informational gaps (Oearmann & Ziolkowski, 2002).

Additionally, students might encounter several issues while editing their reference list in an appropriate referencing format. Hence, as stated by Harzing (2002), errors in formatting references may decrease the trustworthiness of writers: "When practitioners discover that academics fail to do so, that they resort to carelessly repeating what others have said ... they are unlikely to value the academic's advice" (p. 145). Thus, it is vital to familiarize oneself with different referencing styles.

Lack of Cohesion and Coherence

This section will review some of the academic writing challenges students usually face when writing their papers and dissertations, namely issues associated with coherence and cohesion.

The term coherence is defined as "the underlying semantic relations that allow a text to be understood" (Zor, 2006, p. 9); thus, a text is considered coherent when it is meaningful. Another description of coherence is given by Tanskanen and Benjamins (2006) as being the

result of a conversation between a reader and the text itself. For instance, it was revealed that most Malaysian students believe that knowledge of grammar is enough to produce quality writing (Karuppiah, 2008). However, it may not be sufficient to prevent problems in producing coherent writing. In this regard, Lee (2004) stated that such issues occur because students mainly focus on language use instead of meaning-making.

The notion of cohesion is described by Enkvist (1990) as “overt links on the textual surface that help the reader perceive the semantic integrity of a text” (p. 11). Hence, cohesion is perceived to be the natural connection of ideas that eases the flow of a text. Unfortunately, the study conducted by Taher (1999) has shown that Yemeni students lack the ability to write with cohesion, including a lack of academic vocabulary, language knowledge, and the ability to choose the appropriate language. Moreover, a study conducted by Al Badi (2015) also demonstrated that the majority of students (16 out of 20) were aware of the significant role that cohesion and coherence plays in writing, yet they still struggled with making coherent sentences. According to one of the participants' answers, the reason for having difficulties with cohesion might be because of their insufficient knowledge about cohesive devices, namely academic vocabulary, the structure and the organization of academic writing (Al Badi, 2015).

To conclude, academic writing is an essential skill for undergraduate students to master, but it is also challenging to acquire. Based on the research presented above, it can be concluded that students may face a number of different challenges while writing academic papers and assignments. These difficulties are mainly due to a lack of prior knowledge about academic writing, academic vocabulary, and linguistic abilities, and factors that might cause students' academic writing difficulties are discussed below.

Factors Causing Academic Writing Challenges

This section provides an overview of several factors that cause the academic writing challenges of ESL/EFL students studying at an EMI university that are revealed from the literature analysis. These challenges are analyzed through the lens of the following three factors: first, student-related factors, including psychological factors, prior knowledge, and low proficiency in the second language (L2); second, context-related factors, which relate to cultural transfer, and L1 transfer into L2 writing; third, instructor-related factors, including writing strategies in L2, and supervisor feedback.

Student-Related Factors

Student-related factors are one of the main factors affecting students' academic writing. These include psychological factors, factors regarding prior knowledge, and low proficiency in L2.

Psychological Factors. This section focuses on psychological factors, such as self-confidence and motivation factors and their relation to academic writing challenges.

Firstly, the term self-confidence refers to “the belief that a person has in their ability to succeed at a task, based on whether or not they have been able to perform that task in the past” (Adalikwu, 2012, pp. 5-6). In this regard, Baggour (2015) stated that students should believe in their abilities to achieve their tasks successfully. Hence, self-confidence is one of the essential factors in producing quality writing in L2. For instance, Albertson (2006) claimed that when students are confident in their writing abilities at the tertiary level, they will be more adaptive when acquiring new knowledge. On the other hand, the results of research conducted to identify the writing issues of Egyptian students showed that students with low levels of confidence struggle in expressing their thoughts in their writing (Ahmed, 2011).

Another psychological factor is the motivation of students to compose their writing. Brown (2000) defined the term motivation as an internal feeling that drives students to react to a particular situation. Academic writing is a complicated task that demands a combination of mental and physical actions to produce coherent writing assignments (Scott, 2009); thus, it requires that students be highly motivated to enhance their writing competence (Shah et al., 2011). Therefore, a lack of motivation can negatively affect students' learning L2 writing and teachers' teaching abilities as was shown in a Saudi university context (Al-Khairy, 2013).

Prior Knowledge. Another factor is related to the influence of prior knowledge that students have acquired previous to their higher education. According to Edwards and Westgate (1994), the term prior knowledge is defined as “an interaction between what is already known and new experience” (p. 6). Moreover, prior knowledge is one of the main factors affecting students' writing development, but a lack of it causes academic writing difficulties. Thus, it plays an important role in comprehending texts (Heller, 1999), and affects students' confidence levels and the quality of their text production (Myhill, 2005).

Many researchers have identified poor prior knowledge about a text and topic as negatively impacting students' understanding of the text (El-Mortaji, 2001; Scordaras, 2003). As an example, the findings of the study conducted by Tawalbeh and Al-Zuoud (2013) demonstrate that students with a high level of prior knowledge showed high results in comparison to those students with a low level of prior knowledge in terms of their writing studies.

Low Proficiency in L2. Low proficiency is another significant factor that influences the quality of students' writing and may cause various academic writing problems. It is considered a vital element in developing learners' writing production in their L2 (Cumming,

2006). On a related note, students with a sufficient level of L2 proficiency have no difficulties in composing writings at a basic level (Larios et al., 2001). In addition, they are more likely to comprehend metacognitive strategies (Bosher, 1998). Thus, as Hussein and Mohammad (2010) found in their study, students at Qatar University faced difficulties in terms of using academic words properly, finding and using appropriate linguistic structures, and expressing thoughts in their L2 because of their poor language proficiency. To sum up, this section discussed the student-related factors including psychological factors, prior knowledge and low proficiency. The next section will focus on context-related factors.

Context-Related Factors

The analysis of the literature revealed two context-related factors that are discussed below: cultural transfer and L1 transfer to L2 writing.

Cultural Transfer. Le (2006) has defined the concept of culture as "the framework of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that are used to interpret other people's actions, words or writing, and patterns of thinking" (p. 5). Thus, the main relationship between writing and culture can be described as one where writing is used to demonstrate learners' thoughts and culture helps them construct and form their ideas. Thus, ESL/EFL students need to be familiar with cultural discrepancies in order to accurately share their ideas. Hence, cases of cultural transfer appear when students learn English as their L2 or a foreign language or when they learn through English in an EMI setting (Abu Rass, 2011).

L1 Transfer into L2 Writing. According to Faerch and Kasper (1987), the term transfer is defined as "a mental and a communicative process through which L2 learners develop their interlanguage skills by activating and using their previous linguistic knowledge" (p. 120). Indeed, the transfer of the first language might occur when students compose writing

in their L2 to produce their thoughts (Mahmoud, 2000). As an example, many studies have shown that the transfer of the Arabic language as the mother tongue of students can decrease the development of their English language and L2 writing abilities (El-Shafie, 1990; Kamel, 1989; Kharma, 1987). For instance, since there are many differences between English and Arabic, learners may encounter some issues while learning English as their L2 (Al-Hammadi, 2011). In the same vein, Radwan (2012) claims that the "transfer from the native language into the target language during the writing process decreases as the writers' L2 proficiency develops" (p. 365). To summarize, context-related factors such as cultural transfer and L1 transfer into L2 writing can impact students' academic writing. Instructor-related factors are another factor affecting the writing quality of students, which are discussed in the next section.

Instructor-Related Factors

Instructor-related factors such as the introduction of writing strategies in L2 and the feedback of supervisors regarding their students' L2 writing also affect students' academic writing.

Writing Strategies in L2. A number of studies have shown that students' varying coping strategies affect their L2 writing process. In this regard, McMullen (2009) stated that writing strategies are vital since they impact the way students improve their L2 writing skills. In the same vein, the term writing strategies is defined by Alnooh (2015) as "actions, behaviors, and techniques that are consciously selected by students to produce a competent and effective piece of writing" (p. 41). Moreover, it has been claimed that students who are highly proficient in writing tend to use various metacognitive strategies to organize their thoughts more effectively than less-skilled students (Raooifi et al., 2014). One such strategy is brainstorming, since it could be beneficial for "generating more ideas, stimulating new ideas,

expanding the vision of thinking, activating previous knowledge, reviewing more words” (Wang, 2008, p. 75). On a related note, it was claimed that brainstorming can help students focus more on expressing their thoughts rather than continuously searching for ideas for their writing (Maroof & Murat, 2013).

Supervisor Feedback on Students' L2 Writing. Feedback is one of the most influential factors that affect learners' L2 writing process and the quality of their writing. It can assist students in identifying successful methods for expressing their thoughts, transferring the meaning of a text, and practicing using a variety of linguistic apparatuses (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Liu & Hansen, 2002). Thus, it is a crucial element in composing an accurate and readable piece of writing (Ferris, 2003). A considerable amount of research has shown that feedback from a supervisor exerts a strong influence on their learners' writing skills development, and this affects the quality of the writing (Bitchener et al., 2010; Caterall et al., 2011; Idris, 2011). Moreover, supervisors' support, feedback, and advice can lessen their learners' need for help, thus helping them become independent professional writers (Bitchener et al., 2010).

To sum up, this section has provided a description of factors that might cause students' academic writing challenges. Based on previous research, these factors have been grouped under three broad categories: student-related factors, context-related factors, and in some cases, possible instructor-related factors such as when feedback from a student's instructor may be lacking or insufficient. The next section analyzes the strategies that students use to cope with academic writing challenges.

Writing Strategies

According to various international studies, students studying in EMI programs utilize an array of writing strategies to complete their work. A number of previously conducted studies have highlighted the significance of developing one's writing strategies and using feedback in the writing process to strengthen their writing (Graham, 2006; Nelson & Schunn, 2009; Donker et al., 2014). The same idea is also present in higher education (MacArthur et al., 2015; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Wischgoll, 2016). As for the definition, Raoofi et al. (2017) argue that writing strategies refer to the methods and operations that students use to write better and more efficiently. Specifically, writing strategies can assist students in monitoring and retrofitting the effort that is put into their writing tasks (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Thus, to produce a quality piece of writing, learners should plan their writing. While preparing and planning the writing process, students should possess effective writing strategies that will prevent most possible mistakes including those of a technical and grammatical nature. For instance, the results of Singh's (2017) qualitative study that was conducted with 70 international graduate students in Malaysia showed that students used several strategies such as an attempt to employ correct writing techniques. They also utilized external resources, referred to non-formal advisory services, and enhanced their English language proficiency to enable them to cope with their academic writing challenges. Hence, appropriately chosen writing strategies are believed to increase the quality of students' writing.

According to Raoofi et al.'s (2017) classification, there are five types of writing strategies. These strategies are meta-cognitive strategy, cognitive strategy, effort regulation, social strategy and affective strategy. Consequently, meta-cognitive strategies are students' global skills, which demonstrate their ability to be aware of their comprehension and

motivation level. On the other hand, cognitive strategies are individual strategies that allow students to work and transfer data. Next, social strategies are focused on increasing awareness of other people, including actions such as communicating and helping colleagues to surmount particular learning issues. Effort regulation strategies are connected to students' abilities to regulate their efforts in relation to writing in general and L2 writing in particular. Lastly, affective strategies are utilized to control one's emotions, motivation and attitude (e.g., strategies for overcoming concerns).

To conclude, strategies are essential in producing quality writing. The absence of effective writing strategies might cause students to perceive writing as an overly challenging task, and to therefore try to avoid it. Thus, learners should adopt strategies that will strengthen their writing and overcome the challenges that they might face while writing.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theoretical approach of Lea and Street's (2006) model of academic literacies that was used as a foundation for this study. This theory comprises three models: a study skills model, an academic socialization model, and an academic literacy model as discussed below.

This particular theoretical model explores university students' learning in higher education. The main idea behind Lea and Street's (2006) approach is the understanding of the writing and literacy of students in an academic context without engaging in debates about what is good or bad writing. As mentioned above, there are three overlapping models created by Lea and Street (2006): a study skills model, an academic socialization model, and an academic literacy model.

In the study skills model, writing and literacy are considered as individual and cognitive skills. Moreover, this model studies only the basic information concerning the form of language and assumes that students can easily transfer their knowledge about writing and literacy to other contexts. Furthermore, the study skills model focuses on the teaching of formal language peculiarities, such as grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Secondly, the academic socialization model refers to the acculturation of students into disciplinary and subject-based discourses and genres. "Students acquire the ways of talking, writing, thinking, and using literacy that typified members of a disciplinary or subject area community" (Lea & Street, 2006, p.369). The academic socialization model emphasizes the belief that disciplinary discourses and genres are stable and, if students acquire the fundamental knowledge of particular academic discourse, they can certainly reproduce it several times. The third model, the academic literacy model, is a combination of content from both the study skills and academic socialization models. This model claims that reading and writing skills depend not only on discipline, but also on context, culture, and genre. Considering the fact that the social and cultural approach is embedded in the academic literacy model to understand student writing, this model was chosen as the most appropriate framework for understanding the academic writing problems of Kazakhstani undergraduate students studying in EMI contexts.

Although there are many other theories for ESL/EFL learners related to the concepts of writing, particularly academic writing, this study is based on the academic literacies theoretical framework for the following reasons. First, this theory tends to be the most suitable for Kazakhstani undergraduates since academic writing is a challenging skill for them to acquire, and this framework can serve as a guide to prevent certain issues related to grammar,

vocabulary, and others. Even students who have graduated from EMI schools encountered several difficulties that illustrate the extreme importance of fluency and literacy in academic writing. Hence, this theory emphasizes the significance of literacy in academic writing in order to produce quality work. In contrast, other theories such as the cognitive-developmental theory concentrate only on a writer's creativity, and the contrastive rhetoric theory focuses on the text. As a consequence, this particular theory is essential in this study as it explains the significance of such factors as culture, context, and genre in the writing of student papers, dissertations, and assignments.

Conclusion

The literature review chapter has broadened our understanding of the concepts related to the present study and provided the necessary theoretical framework to support it. The chapter has attempted to provide a synthesis and critical analysis of various scholarly literature on academic writing in general and experiences about academic writing challenges. In particular, the notions of EMI, academic writing and perceptions related to it were explained. Subsequently, the focus was narrowed to academic writing challenges, namely the lack of academic vocabulary, appropriate use of sources, and difficulties associated with cohesion and coherence. After that, the factors that cause these difficulties, such as psychological factors, student-related factors, and instructor-related factors have been discussed. Still, the research in Kazakhstan related to academic writing challenges remains scarce and no research has directly addressed undergraduate students' experiences with academic writing yet.

The final part of the chapter was dedicated to the theoretical framework of this study, which is built on Lea and Street's (2006) academic literacy theory and consists of three models: 1) the study skills model; 2) the academic socialization model; and 3) the academic

literacy model. This literature analysis lays the foundation of the methodology of the present study, which is discussed in the following section.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the literature connected to the different types of challenges undergraduate students encounter, particularly academic writing challenges, and the factors that cause those challenges. The aim of the present chapter is to provide the methodological foundation of this study, which was aimed at investigating Kazakhstani undergraduate students' perceptions on academic writing challenges. To accomplish this aim, three research questions have been posed:

1. What are the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students at an EMI university as perceived by them?
2. What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges?
3. How do students cope with these challenges?

For the purpose of presenting the methodology employed for the study, the research approach and design are described first. This is followed by the explanation and justification of the research site and sampling procedures along with the participants' selection and recruitment. After that, the data collection instrument and procedures are discussed in detail. Then, the data analysis procedures are provided. Lastly, ethical considerations are presented, followed by the conclusion of the current chapter.

Research Approach and Design

In this section, the research design the researcher has found the most appropriate for this study is presented.

A qualitative approach was employed in order to provide an effective response to the research questions of the current study. Qualitative research is defined as research that offers

findings that are not procured from mathematical analysis or numerical data as in the quantitative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This specific research method was deemed appropriate since it provides information in a detailed way (Creswell, 2014) and focuses on investigating and comprehending human practices more effectively in comparison to the quantitative approach (Polkinghorne, 2005). In addition, the qualitative approach helps in the investigation of an issue and provides an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon of this study (Creswell, 2014), which is academic writing challenges at an EMI university. Besides, almost all previous studies in the sphere of academic writing challenges have used qualitative methods to investigate students' perceptions of studying through EMI (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Ankawi, 2015; Eldaba and Isbell, 2018; Singh, 2017; Yeh, 2010). Hence, the data gained through this approach will highlight the core interest of my research by zeroing in on the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students and the strategies they use to overcome those challenges.

Furthermore, a case study research design was employed in the current study. Hitchcock and Hughes (as cited in Cohen et al., 2011) stated that case studies are "concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case, explore a specific phenomenon of interest focusing on one or more sites and on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events" (p. 253). Therefore, the main purpose of the case study is to provide an in-depth analysis of a central phenomenon either in a specific case or in a population (Hayes, et al., 2015). In particular, an instrumental case study was chosen as the research design since this is a study of a case that produces a deep understanding of one specific issue (Mills et al., 2010), namely, the academic writing challenges students face while

studying at an EMI university. Moreover, the instrumental case study is the one most commonly used when one sample is used to grasp a general principle (Ilott et al., 2013).

Research Site

In this section, the research site and the justification for its choice are described.

In alignment with the research purpose and questions, the study was conducted in Kazakhstan's sole autonomous university located in Nur-Sultan City. The choice of the university was based on two principal reasons. First, this is an EMI university; hence, it provides education in the English language. Second, among the different schools of the university, it contains the School of Sciences and Humanities, which provided the necessary participants for the study. In particular, the humanities major students from this school were recruited as participants for the study, which aimed to focus on the challenges of this particular cohort. The main reason for choosing all participants from one site was due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, when obtaining access to several sites had become a problematic process.

Participants and Sampling

In this section, the researcher dwells on the participants selected for this study and the strategies that were employed for their recruitment.

The study's target population are first-year students in undergraduate programs, at an EMI university, who are majoring in humanities disciplines within the School of Sciences and Humanities. These are students who, compared to science majoring students, are more involved in academic writing. This study comprises a case study, for which 10 participants were selected. Because a considerable number is "neither practical nor beneficial", the number of participants in qualitative research tends to be small (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 88).

To fulfill the needs of this research, the researcher has utilized purposeful sampling and intentionally selected the participants and the site as opposed to the procedures that are applied with quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). For the present study, a maximal variation sampling was used because it selects individuals that differ in some characteristics (Creswell, 2014). This sampling strategy was used to develop multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2014). Hence, for this particular inquiry, participants were selected based on the following characteristics: that they 1) be aged 18 or more; 2) be majoring in humanities; 3) be the first-year undergraduate students who were selected because such a population group of freshmen students would still be more likely to be influenced by background factors affecting their academic writing abilities.

Data Collection Instruments

In the sections above, the research design, site selection, participants and sampling have been described. In this section, the research methods used to collect the data for my study are described and justified.

In the present study, interviews were chosen as the main data collection instrument. According to Rowley (2012), one of the significant advantages of conducting interviews in qualitative research is that they provide more insights and details. Therefore, the researcher of the study prepared an interview protocol, a form designed by a researcher that contains the interview instructions, prepared questions, and sections to take notes of the interviewees' responses (Creswell, 2014). To explore undergraduate students' academic writing challenges and the strategies used to overcome these challenges, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each student. The researcher found the semi-structured interviews to be the most suitable for her study, and this enabled her to prepare well-structured

questions before collecting the data and to utilize some sub-questions and prompts to ensure that the interviewee has a chance to respond to the main questions sufficiently (Rowley, 2012). As Marton (1986) states, the semi-structured interview questions should be “as open-ended as possible, in order to let the subject choose the dimensions of the question they want to answer” (p. 42).

Furthermore, Creswell (2014) states that one-to-one interviews allow the participants to share their ideas comfortably. The interview protocol comprised ten preliminary developed open-ended questions provided in three languages, English, Russian or Kazakh for the convenience of the students, and to allow them to select the most suitable language for their interview (see Appendix A). The interview questions were designed to identify the academic writing challenges of the students, factors that cause these challenges, and their strategies to deal with them. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via Zoom - a video conferencing platform. Each interview lasted from 30 to 50 minutes. Before conducting the actual interviews, the instrument was piloted with my peers during the Thesis Research Seminar sessions to eliminate unnecessary and confusing questions and to ensure a clear understanding of the provided questions. Consequently, some questions were reformulated and made easier to understand. Moreover, a few questions were omitted during the interview from the interview questions since participants had already answered them in previous questions and there was no need to repeat them.

Data Collection Procedures

In the previous section, the data collection instruments utilized in this study were described. In this section, the researcher provides a detailed explanation of the data collection procedures.

As in any research study, it is pivotal for the researcher to receive permission to conduct research at the research site by ensuring the participants' safety, confidentiality, and protection. Therefore, the researcher first obtained permission from the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE) Ethics Committee to conduct this study, involving participants who were students at this university. After obtaining permission from the NUGSE Ethics Committee, the researcher contacted a gatekeeper (the dean of the school) at the chosen research site via email to request access to the site and attached a description of the research study, the interview questions, and the consent form (see Appendix C) in this email to provide the gatekeeper a general idea about the research and its purpose. These documents were sent in all three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English). After giving the permission, the gatekeeper asked me to send the invitation letter and all these documents to him again so he could forward them to all first-year undergraduate humanities majors at the research site. After that, the researcher sent an invitation letter via email to the gatekeeper explaining the research and its risks and benefits and requesting students' voluntary participation in the study. Students were provided with the contact information of the researcher in order to signal their willingness to participate in the study. The remaining number of students contacted the researcher two to three days after they had received the invitation letter. Students were given the opportunity to choose the most appropriate time and date for their interview. The data collection lasted from the beginning of November to the end of December 2021.

After the selected participants had agreed on a date and time for their interview, a notification about the interview was emailed to the selected participants prior to the interview date as agreed with them. Before starting the interview, the researcher explained the purpose, process, confidentiality and anonymity issues, risks, and benefits of the interview and asked

the interviewees to sign an informed consent form electronically (see appendix C). The interviewees were invited to choose a suitable language for the interview from either Kazakh, Russian, or English. Two participants chose English, one chose Kazakh, and seven chose Russian. Moreover, the researcher asked the participants for permission to record their responses. After their permission was granted, each interview was recorded on the researcher's smartphone or laptop. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the world and in our country, all the interviews were held online via the Zoom application. There is a recording function on the application that was helpful for the researcher to download the recordings in mp4 format. After that, the audio recordings of the interview process were transcribed and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, the next stage of the research was to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. The data analysis procedure of the interviews was conducted based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) thematic analysis. The notion of thematic analysis is defined as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meanings (themes) within qualitative data" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 297). In this regard, theme means the representation of essential information closely related to responses or meaning about the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, the data collected from the interviews were analyzed based on the following steps. In the initial step, the researcher checked the quality of the taped interviews since recordings provide an opportunity to listen to them many times. As the ten interviews were carried out in Kazakh, Russian, and English, for the transcription of the participants' responses given in Kazakh and Russian, the researcher used the oTranscribe website, and then translated them into English. As for the responses in English, the interviews

were transcribed manually (see Appendix B). After that, the researcher read and reread those transcripts several times “actively, analytically, and critically”, considering participants’ explicit and implicit thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 205).

The next step for analyzing the data was to code the transcribed answers of the interviewees; for this, the researcher used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013). Subsequently, the researcher used “lean coding” and provided labels for each segment. Then, these codes were divided and grouped under emerging themes (Creswell, 2014, pp. 244-245). After that, the researcher highlighted the themes and codes with different colors that represented the major themes. After analyzing the codes, the researcher grouped some themes into one similar theme to reduce the number of codes. Initially, 60 codes were derived from the transcripts, but after synthesizing them, the researcher outlined 20 codes under three major themes based on the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

In this section, the ethical considerations of this study, including anonymity and confidentiality procedures, and the risks and benefits of the present study will be described.

The researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) on “no more than minimal risk study” and obtained approval from the NUGSE Research Committee to conduct the research.

To ensure anonymity while recruiting the participants from the university administration, a list of all first-year undergraduate students of the humanities majors were requested without mentioning any specific details of the research to prevent the identification of the selected students.

Furthermore, from the beginning of the interview, the researcher explained to the participants the issues of anonymity and confidentiality and ensured their voluntary participation. Before the interview, the researcher thus informed the participants that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without incurring any negative consequences. Therefore, they were informed about the safety and privacy of the data before the interview, whereby their names would be kept anonymous and were to be replaced by pseudonyms during the data analysis. Roberts and Priest (2010) state that "researchers must undertake to keep all information confidential and secure, and to inform participants where and how it will be stored, who will have access to it, and how it will be used" (p. 116). Accordingly, to strengthen the level of confidentiality, any recognizable data such as participants' names and the name of the university were replaced by pseudonyms or generalized names.

Since due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview was conducted online, the researcher was able to ensure that both herself and the participant were sitting in a safe place with no people around.

To ensure the safe storage of the collected data, the researcher used the online cloud on Google Drive, secured with a strong-level password and saved it in a folder with an unremarkable name. Besides, the laptop and smartphone of the researcher were secured by a password to ensure that no one except the researcher had access to any of the data collected in this study. All these measures were taken to guarantee that only the researcher could access these data. Apart from the researcher's supervisor, no information was revealed to anyone. The recorded interviews were immediately deleted from the researcher's smartphone after the researcher had uploaded them onto the online cloud storage; one of the reasons for storing the

data on the online cloud of Google Drive was to ensure that the data would be stored in a safe place.

The study posed no more than minimal risks for the participants. All measures were taken to protect the identifying information of the participants. Before the interview, they were informed that their names and the name of the university would be kept confidential. As for the potential risks to the participants, it was supposed that students could experience psychological distress since the research was about the challenges they encounter in their academic life. As a consequence, the researcher created and formulated the questions in a way that would not harm her participants psychologically or create stress and pressure. Additionally, the researcher reminded her participants of the fact that they had the right to skip questions they found sensitive and that their answers would not be shared with anyone. Other than that, to prevent the risk of miscommunication, the participants were given the choice of the most appropriate language, which could have been either Kazakh, Russian, or English.

Conclusion

The methodology chapter has provided a thorough description of the selected research design, site, participants and sampling, data collection instruments, procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Overall, this research is a qualitative study that investigates the academic writing challenges of EMI university students in Kazakhstan. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling, and the data was collected through semi-structured one-on-one online interviews and subsequently analyzed by a coding method. To ensure the protection of the participants' rights and other ethical considerations, an ethics approval was obtained from the NUGSE Research Committee. The next chapter will provide a description of the main findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

In the previous chapter, the methodology of the current study on Kazakhstani first-year undergraduate students' academic writing challenges at an EMI university was presented. This research used a qualitative case study approach with semi-structured interviews being employed to collect the data. The present chapter reports on the findings obtained from 10 participants to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the academic writing challenges faced by a group of undergraduate students at an EMI university in Kazakhstan as perceived by them?
2. What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges?
3. How do students cope with these challenges?

Based on the research questions mentioned above, this chapter unveils the main findings that relate to the participants' academic writing challenges while studying through English as a medium of instruction (EMI), the factors that cause those challenges, and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. The findings revealed that all 10 students who took part in the interview encountered a number of challenges while writing for their university courses. Based on the research questions, the findings are presented under three themes: academic writing challenges, factors affecting the development of academic writing, and strategies to solve these challenges. The findings have been categorized according to the three research questions, and a summary of the major findings is presented at the end of the chapter.

RQ1. What are the academic writing challenges faced by a group of undergraduate students at an EMI university in Kazakhstan as perceived by them?

One of the significant questions posed in the interview was related to identifying

students' difficulties in academic writing while studying at an EMI university. These difficulties are grouped and presented under the following three sub-themes: 1) challenges with vocabulary and grammar, 2) challenges with formatting and citations, and 3) challenges with developing an argument.

Challenges with Vocabulary and Grammar

The findings reveal that difficulties with vocabulary were the most common issue that most interviewees experienced in their academic writing. These difficulties are mostly connected to a lack of vocabulary, both general and academic ones, using overly-simplified words, and finding synonyms, all of which impact students' ability to write "beautifully", which is what they personally aspire to do. Several participants face difficulties with general vocabulary in English: "I have a problem with vocabulary because it is challenging to find different words in English" (S2_EMI), was the way how one of them expressed this problem. Half of the interviewees encounter difficulties with academic vocabulary, which requires them to be selective when using the appropriate academic words to avoid being misunderstood by their readers:

I also have a lack of academic vocabulary, and I use simple words [colloquial vocabulary]. But it is necessary to carefully select the appropriate word according to the meaning *to avoid being misunderstood*. (S5_EMI)

Some of the respondents connect their vocabulary problems with their use of simplified words. They expressed this difficulty the following way: "I use too simple words instead of advanced English vocabulary words" (S1_KMI), and "I know that some words I use in my writing are too simple for academic writing, and I use "Google translator" [online dictionary] to choose the most difficult [academic] words" (S4_EMI). Some explained this

problem as being due to an absence of reading, “because I don’t read books and don’t know many academic words”. (S2_EMI)

Another interesting finding is that two interviewees from a Kazakh-medium of instruction (KMI) background highlighted that they frequently forget the academic words that would help them write “beautifully”:

One of my biggest problems is when I forget the academic words when I am writing. This often happens to me in all three languages. I want to write something *so beautifully at the advanced level*, but those appropriate [sophisticated] words are forgotten. (S8_KMI)

In a similar vein, another student voiced this problem but with the focus on catching the reader’s attention, “It is difficult for me to remember and use *beautiful [academic] words* to attract my readers’ attention” (S9_KMI).

Other respondents stated that they sometimes encounter issues related to finding the more academic-sounding synonyms of chosen terms to further enhance their writing:

Basically, I find it difficult *to find synonyms for words* to describe what I want *to sound more academic*. So, I still have such a problem that I lack vocabulary. In contexts, words can have other meanings, so I sometimes use words out of place. This is one of my difficulties. (S7_EMI)

In addition to their lack of vocabulary resulting in an inability to write “beautifully”, there were also some interviewees who highlighted that they have issues with grammar tense and structure. For instance, “I sometimes face grammatical issues, especially I struggle with choosing the appropriate tense” (S8_KMI), and “I face various problems, one of my weaknesses is grammar” (S7_EMI). Indeed, this grammatical difficulty was pointed out by one of the students as being their most significant challenge:

One of my other issues is related to my grammar knowledge, so I often use “Grammarly”. And sometimes I notice that I make simple mistakes. I think this is the most important difficulty besides vocabulary. (S9_KMI)

Overall, the findings reveal that students' writing difficulties were mostly related to vocabulary and grammar issues as indicated by majority of the participants. These include a lack of academic vocabulary and their use of simplified words, which impact their ability to write “beautifully” and in “advanced English.” Some participants connected their vocabulary issues with insufficient reading, which would lead them to create ambiguity in their writing. Yet, only a few of them experienced grammar problems.

Challenges with Formatting and Citations

The majority of the respondents indicated that issues with formatting and citation styles create significant barriers to their academic writing progress. Such problems include a lack of formatting, citation and referencing skills. This is how they expressed this challenge:

...“I have never seen formatting being entirely correct in my writing assignments”
(S2_EMI)

...“There were problems with citation and referencing, and I still face this problem”
(S3_EMI)

...“Sometimes I have some difficulties with referencing, but this is only about the secondary source” (S8_KMI)

...“Sometimes referencing can be difficult and I check it [correct formatting] with the instructor” (S5_EMI).

This problem seems to be rooted in the students' lack of experience at school. The following quotes illustrate this finding:

... Because, *I had never used anything like this at school before*, and it was something new. And it was necessary to quote everything, and be sure to insert the reference to the author. *It probably took a month or two for me to fully understand how to format in APA.* (S3_EMI)

... Since *in school years we had very little practice with citing the sources* where the information was taken, sometimes I struggle with it. *We weren't required to cite*, so we could easily copy and paste the data. However, while studying at university, *we have realized how important it is to put citations*. (S10_EMI)

Overall, the majority of the students admitted that the choice of a proper citation style and correct formatting were obstacles for them. Indeed, some noted that they had not experienced formatting at school. Hence, they encounter such problems at the EMI university, which strives for academic integrity and strictly follows the particular citation style where they are currently studying.

Challenges with Developing an Argument

Challenges with developing an argument were found among the participants, though this was not considered as major concern as its symptomatic issues that cause the “absence of my own voice as an author”, difficulties with elaborating and explaining ideas and paraphrasing inadequacies. For instance, one respondent raised the issue of struggling with showing this “voice” as the author of his writing. As stated by Interviewee 1:

“In my first work, I noticed the *absence of my own voice as an author*. Because I only cited other authors without providing my own opinion” (S1_KMI).

Moreover, the same participant stated her difficulties with comprehensibly explaining her ideas:

“In the second work, my problem was on elaborating and explaining things. Because of this, some parts of my writing could *look unclear for some readers*” (S1_KMI).

Other respondents indicated that they encountered difficulties with paraphrasing.

"I struggle with paraphrasing another author's ideas and at the same time keep the original meaning" (S2_EMI) and “Sometimes I have problems in conveying my thoughts” (S7_EMI)

was the way these participants phrased it. However, another respondent noted that she had paraphrasing issues before entering the university:

Before I enrolled in my university, I had a problem with paraphrasing. *I used to change words to the most appropriate ones in meaning. This is how I understood the paraphrasing process. However, now I have realized that changing words is not enough.* At the moment, I face some problems with paraphrasing, but not as much as it was before. (S6_EMI)

To recap, a few participants expressed specific difficulties with developing an argument in their writing, which encompass the “absence of my own voice as an author”, difficulties with elaborating and explaining ideas, and paraphrasing issues, particularly, a faulty understanding of the paraphrasing process as being a mere changing of words into others.

Overall, all interviewees stated that they face difficulties with vocabulary and grammar, formatting and citations, and with developing an argument. The next section will highlight the factors that cause difficulties in academic writing of students.

RQ2. What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges?

This section aims to present the factors that contribute to the presence of the aforementioned academic writing challenges of undergraduate students at an EMI university. The themes that emerged from the second research question are: 1) insufficient prior language learning experience, and 2) lack of interaction and insufficient feedback.

Insufficient Prior Language Learning Experience

The overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that low English language proficiency, the transfer of mother tongue skills to writing in the second language, both of which are caused by insufficient previous learning experiences in academic writing in this language could be considered as factors that cause their academic writing difficulties. Almost

all interview participants recognized that English language proficiency is an important factor that impacts their academic writing; more than half who actually have a high level of English language proficiency face fewer challenges in academic writing. The following extracts can demonstrate this finding:

...“I think that previous knowledge helped me a lot” (S7_EMI)

... “If you know the words in an academic language but don't know how to use them, it's like you don't know them. Experience of good work can be noticed immediately” (S4_EMI).

In a similar vein, one of the interviewees expressed that the written works of students from EMI schools differ from those of other students:

In any case, if you studied at an EMI school before, it will be *visible in your written works* and not only. And those who have not had such practice will still face various problems, especially with regards to academic writing. (S3_EMI)

Hence, almost half of the interviewees believe that low English proficiency due to a lack of previous experience has a negative impact on student writing. The following quotes best support this finding:

... “There are a lot of students from state schools, who learn English only as a subject twice a week. I believe they struggle a lot with assignments” (S10_EMI)

... “I think the low level of English is another important factor. If one has poor English, then he does not know how to write academic writing” (S6_EMI).

Moreover, one of the interviewees reported that there is a great difference between her and her peers' writing assignments due to their previous language experience:

It's [English proficiency] very influential. If you compare me with no previous language experience, and my friends who came from the foundation program, respectively, they had an EAP [English for Academic Purposes] where they were directly taught how to write. Of course, there is a great difference between my essay

and theirs. That essay of mine seems very raw, I can say amateurish. So, I think being proficient in English matters. (S8_KMI)

Another factor that several participants pointed out is the transfer of their first language (L1) knowledge and skills to writing in a second language (L2). The following quotes demonstrate this finding:

...“It always seems that *in the tip of my tongue* I have words in my L1 while writing in L2. It seems that the word in L1 perfectly fits into the content of my writing” (S10_EMI)

...“Even if you write in English, you will automatically think in Kazakh or Russian. Sometimes, when making a mental direct translation, the meaning seems to be inconsistent. And it reduces quality” (S2_EMI).

Interestingly, another respondent stated that the assigned time for the task causes the transfer of L1:

... Transfer of L1 into L2 writing happens to me when I should write something in a very short time. Instead of thinking in English, *thoughts automatically come out in L1* [Russian or Kazakh]. In these cases, I write my ideas in whatever language, then translate them into English. (S8_KMI)

As reported by some interviewees, a lack of previous training in academic writing was found to be another factor affecting students' writing in this genre. Almost half of the interviewees asserted that they had no previous experience in academic writing, the following quotes best support this finding:

... “I've never really had any experience, especially in academic writing” (S8_KMI)

... “Again, probably because I had never written such essays before. I probably never wrote so many essays in my life” (S3_EMI)

To sum up, more than half of the participants indicated that low English language proficiency, the transfer of mother tongue skills to writing in the second language, and insufficient previous learning experiences in academic writing negatively impact their academic writing thus to some extent causing above mentioned challenges.

Lack of Interaction and Insufficient Feedback

The overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that their level of interaction, as writers, with their instructors is a crucial factor affecting the quality of their writing. This particular theme includes sub-themes related to insufficient or a disregard of the feedback of instructors, as well as a lack of guidance and instruction from them.

One of the main factors affecting the respondents' academic writing abilities is the scenario where their instructor's feedback is lacking or is insufficient, and thus impedes the development of a student's academic writing skills. Indeed, one of the participants believes that the benefits of any such feedback depends on the quality of that feedback and stated:

Well, it depends on what kind of feedback you receive. If it is short and incomprehensible, then you lose motivation to finish writing. But if it is more constructive, then, on the contrary, it improves the work very well. (S5_EMI)

Another participant claimed that receiving her instructor's feedback is ineffective to her, "Sometimes I do not consider my instructor's feedback. I do it in the way I like and do not make any corrections" (S10_EMI).

This demonstrates the negative effects of feedback that is perceived as ineffective and limited to the development of students' writing skills. One of the respondents stated that a lack of guidance and support is another factor that negatively affects her writing. She stated that:

... I think another factor that affects my academic writing could be a lack of guidance and instruction. It is when our professors provide us with unclear criteria for the

assignment. In general, you know that you are expected to write an essay, but it is important to know what professors' expectations are. (S10_EMI)

Overall, according to the participants' answers, a lack of detailed and effective interaction and feedback could prevent a student from acquiring the ability to write well academically. These factors translate point to either the inefficiency of this feedback or students' disregard of such feedback, as well as a lack of guidance and instruction, all of which would have a negative impact on writing.

To sum up, the majority of respondents found that there are several factors that cause their academic writing challenges. These are a limited amount of language learning background and previous knowledge of academic writing techniques, and a lack of feedback and interaction. The next section will demonstrate the strategies that undergraduate students found useful to cope with their academic writing challenges.

RQ3. How do students cope with these challenges?

Data analysis from the interviews revealed a few strategies that are used to deal with the academic writing challenges. These include the following: 1) strategies to write effectively, and 2) using feedback to produce quality writing.

Strategies to Write Effectively

Half of the respondents expressed that some strategies used to write more effectively include brainstorming, planning and organizing ideas, expanding their vocabulary, good academic preparation, utilizing online dictionaries, and using IELTS writing structures. One of the participants stated that “it is useful to focus on our brainstorming and write our thoughts down” (S1_KMI). Another participant shared the same idea and added that writing several drafts is useful in terms of making necessary corrections:

While writing you may want to change or add something. In this case, to keep ideas, I would suggest writing several drafts, and at the same time saving each draft as a separate document rather than drafting one document several times. (S10_EMI)

Besides, one of the interviewees stated that dividing a large task into smaller ones helps facilitate the writing process. The following quote best supports this idea:

“I like to squash the task into small tasks so that the process does not sound scary. Sometimes when I don't want to write anything, I start writing from the easiest part” (S5_EMI).

Moreover, one student found it useful to make outlines while planning her writing to save time and structure her work:

Outlining is another important suggestion I would give to other students while planning their writing. It makes your work *more structured and helps to save your time*. Also, when you have a clear outline, the organization of ideas will be good. (S10_EMI)

Two of the respondents found that expanding their vocabulary is another important strategy to help them surmount their academic writing challenges. They reported that enlarging one's vocabulary helps to overcome a lack of vocabulary:

...“As I have already mentioned that one of my difficulties is a small vocabulary, and I try to learn new words every day to cope with it” (S7_EMI)

...“Obviously, you need to increase your word stock to write a good academic paper. Also, I think it is important to take notes of new phrases, or words to widen the vocabulary range of a person” (S9_KMI).

Two of the participants expressed the opinion that using online dictionaries can have a negative impact and lead to addiction, which means that abandoning online dictionaries represents a strategy in and of itself. “Another piece of advice is the rejection of any auxiliary grammar and translator tools because it makes the process more difficult, and you get used to it” (S8_KMI) and “I notice a lot of students using online dictionaries, and I would suggest not

using it at all because then you might be addicted to it” (S9_KMI) was the way respondents phrased it.

Interestingly, one of the participants expressed the idea that adapting the IELTS writing structure in all types of writing assignments is an important strategy for writing effectively:

I always use the same structure when writing, and this structure is IELTS. It is a very simple structure, and easy to apply. When we do peer feedback, I notice that my peers write each time differently, and their writings are not well-structured. (S8_KMI)

Overall, half of the participants indicated that they use several strategies such as brainstorming, planning, and organizing ideas, expanding vocabulary, abandoning online dictionaries, and using IELTS writing structures to write effectively and overcome academic writing problems.

Using Feedback to Produce Quality Writing

Almost half of the interviewees found that conducting peer feedback, and working with their instructor's feedback were the most helpful strategies to produce quality writing. As reported by the interviewees, both giving and receiving peer feedback can be crucial for identifying mistakes, improving one's writing and coping with writing difficulties. Nearly half of the respondents stated that peer feedback is helpful for creating more eloquent writing, though two claimed that this actually depends on your peer, as a peer whose level of academic writing is low could actually hamper their progress. For instance, participants stated that:

...“I think it depends on the peer. If you receive feedback from a very responsible person who writes thorough feedback, then this helps a lot” (S5_EMI)

...“It depends on who you got with, if this person also has a poor level of English, then perhaps there will be even more mistakes than before” (S6_EMI)

However, in a positive vein, the comments regarding peer feedback more frequently refers to its being a useful coping strategy. To illustrate the point, one participant said that both receiving and giving feedback to peers helps identify weaknesses in their writing:

...“I think doing peer feedback, *both receiving and writing, is very helpful* in terms of recognizing your mistakes, and making some corrections if needed. Sometimes you can't see your own mistakes in your writing. In this case, peers could help you review and identify some issues if they exist” (S4_EMI).

Likewise, another participant stated:

...“I think peer review helps a lot because they are students like us. They may notice a lot of things that you may not notice when you are re-examining your work” (S2_EMI).

Hence, though some respondents as mentioned above feel that the benefits of conducting peer feedback depends on one's peer review partner, it was nonetheless stated that it is important to give and receive feedback from one's peers because “when you check someone's work, you can analyze your work from a different perspective, too” (S5_EMI). Besides, this respondent added that having a “study-buddy” group helps you to stay motivated:

“Have a study buddy group to always study together. When you work together, you never lose your motivation and interest” (S5_EMI).

Moreover, another participant expressed the idea that receiving peer feedback is helpful since they do not always have the opportunity to receive feedback from their instructors:

“It is helpful to have your mates who can read your works and give feedback. That really helps because you don't have an opportunity to always have the feedback of the professor” (S1_KMI).

The same idea was stated by another interviewee, who stated that receiving feedback is

significant as it allows one to make some corrections before sending their work to the professor:

I usually ask for an outside opinion. Receiving feedback from your peers before sending it to your professor is significant to recognize your mistakes that you might not notice. Then, you can make some corrections if you need, and submit them to your professor. (S8_KMI)

Another important strategy indicated by some students is working with their instructor's feedback to identify weaknesses in their writing. Almost all the interview participants stated that receiving their instructor's feedback is crucial to enabling them to produce quality writing. The following quotes best support this finding:

...“When they [instructors] leave feedback, I find it useful in terms of identifying in what vein do I need to move, and how I can accurately convey my position” (S7_EMI)

...“Sometimes supervisors can help you not to use too academic words where it is not necessary. In such cases, we will try to use more simple language” (S8_KMI).

These quotes delineate the respondents' positive perceptions of their teacher's feedback.

Predictably, too, one of the respondents connected his applying his supervisor's feedback with getting a higher grade. He stated:

...“I think receiving instructor's feedback is very important. Since these instructors will evaluate my work, I must do everything according to their comments. Only when I do what they like can I get a good grade” (S4_EMI) .

Moreover, some representative comments include:

...“Personally, I would suggest considering the opinion of your course instructor. In many cases, or almost in all cases their comments are useful” (S3_EMI)

... “I find it useful to work with my instructor's feedback because he is, of course, knowledgeable, and notices mistakes that I didn't notice” (S8_KMI).

In fact, one of the students stated that disregarding an instructor's feedback would negatively affect her writing by pointing out that this “might give me a lower grade and shows disrespect to my teacher I think” (S10_EMI).

Hence, nearly half of the respondents highlighted that they use several strategies to produce quality writing; these include conducting peer feedback and working with their instructor's feedback.

To summarize, regarding the variety of strategies used, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees expressed that they use several to overcome their academic writing challenges. They include strategies to write effectively and using feedback to produce quality writing.

List of Major Findings:

1. The majority of students, to some extent, have encountered various challenges with academic writing that are mostly connected with an insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, a low competency in formatting and employing citations, and their lack of skills related to developing argumentation, including their authorial “voice”, all of which have impacted the quality of their writing.
2. It was found that the challenges connected with vocabulary negatively affected the students' ability to “write beautifully” and to “sound more academic” as they perceive they have to write, based on their previous learning experiences.
3. The majority of students pointed to their insufficient prior experiences learning in the English language as an important factor in their academic writing difficulties.
4. Insufficient interaction with and feedback from instructors was a factor that prevented some students from improving their academic English writing.

5. The majority of students indicated that they employ the techniques of brainstorming and of organizing their ideas as an aid to their writing.
6. Students increasing their vocabulary has been mentioned as being one of their main strategies to improve their writing.
7. Peer and instructor feedback, for some students, was a technique that assisted them in improving their academic writing.

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has presented the findings on undergraduate students' academic writing challenges as they were revealed through the semi-structured interviews. The findings demonstrate that learners encounter several academic writing challenges while studying at an EMI university, namely difficulties with vocabulary, formatting and citations, developing an argument, and grammar. Furthermore, the students who were interviewed for the study have indicated that several factors cause their academic writing challenges; these include insufficient prior language learning experiences that were lacking in some way, and a lack of interaction with their instructors. Additionally, the participants referred to a list of strategies that contribute to helping them cope with the academic writing challenges they are faced with. These diverse strategies are employed to help them to write effectively and use feedback to produce quality writing. The findings presented in this chapter will be explained in relation to the theoretical framework and empirical literature in the upcoming Discussion chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

While the previous chapter presented the findings that were based on the qualitative data from ten semi-structured online interviews with undergraduate students at an EMI university in Nur-Sultan, the current chapter dwells on the discussion of those findings in relation to the literature that addressed this topic. This research study has attempted to investigate the academic writing challenges encountered by Kazakhstani undergraduate students studying at an EMI university, unravel the factors that have caused these challenges, and discover the strategies used by the participants to overcome these challenges. To achieve these objectives, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students at an EMI university as perceived by them?
2. What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges?
3. How do students cope with these challenges?

Hence, this chapter is divided into three sections which emerged according to the research questions mentioned above. To start with, the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students as perceived by them are discussed. This is followed by the factors that cause these challenges. Finally, the strategies students use to overcome these challenges are interpreted.

RQ1. What are the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students at an EMI university as perceived by them?

The first question in this study sought to determine whether undergraduate students encounter any difficulties in their academic writings, and identify the types of challenges they face. This section presents the challenges faced by the majority of the respondents; these are related to

grammar, vocabulary, formatting and the use of citations, and argumentation. Furthermore, students' difficulties with vocabulary impacts their ability to write in a way they consider to be both "beautiful" and academic. To shed more light on this matter, one of the findings given below is discussed in relation to the reviewed literature:

Finding 1

The majority of students, to some extent, have encountered various challenges with academic writing that are mostly connected with an insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, a low competency in formatting and employing citations, and their lack of skills related to developing argumentation, including their authorial "voice", all of which have impacted the quality of their writing.

The findings of this study indicate that the students encounter several difficulties in academic writing. This finding matches Colwell et al.'s (2011) view to some extent: "Typical problems with student writing (graduate and undergraduate) can include issues with mechanics (i.e., grammar.), failing to cite reference sources, [organization], how much detail to include, conclusions not supported with logical inference, voice and use of the first person" (p. 5). This finding supports those of other researchers (Al Badi, 2015; Al Fadda, 2012; Bian & Wang, 2016).

An interesting finding is that the majority of respondents considered vocabulary to be extremely challenging as they have a lack of academic vocabulary, which affects their ability to produce quality academic writing. As was reported, the students connected their vocabulary issues with the inability to find synonyms in English, which they recognize as a shortcoming as some of them believe that it is indeed important to select appropriate academic vocabulary for academic writing to be comprehensible. This phenomenon is in compliance with

Samigullina's (2018) findings that writers are expected to use academic and specialized vocabulary or technical jargon. Moreover, these data fully correlate with findings from previous research, which demonstrate that nearly one-third of Jordanian postgraduate students at a Malaysian university encountered similar issues with vocabulary that was described as "feeling short of" appropriate academic vocabulary while writing (Almatarneh et al., 2018, p. 252). One reason for students' vocabulary issues might be that these students have minimal understanding of the lexical aspect of the English language and thus struggle with explaining their thoughts due to their lack of appropriate words for academic writing (Kuo, 2011). It is true that in any language it is the lexis, to a greater extent than the grammar, that enables one to more clearly communicate meaning, and since academic English has its own specific vocabulary, a student's lack of it would prevent them from writing well.

Another important finding that more than half of the students faced in their academic writing is their low competency in formatting and citation. This particular result supports that of a previous study conducted by Al Badi (2015) which revealed that referencing and citation represent a set of problems that 44% of the ESL learners who participated in his study encountered while producing academic writing. This is due to students' low previous knowledge about formatting, since at school only few of them had been taught to use different citation styles (Wallace et al., 1999). In Kazakhstan, only some EMI schools instruct the students about the importance of formatting and citation, but there are only a small number of such schools that exist. Thus, students with no or low previous knowledge of formatting and citation struggle with this at the university level. Based on my former experience as a student in NIS schools, I have seen teachers who regularly remind students about the importance of academic integrity in their work, including writing assignments. Thus, to attain the skills that

enable students to achieve such integrity, we were taught the correct way of formatting our writings, employing citations, and referencing other sources to some extent. However, I had no such experience working with and developing these skills in my previous school because we did not write academic papers. Instead, we wrote essays about ourselves, nature, and other topics with no additional information from other sources being required.

The current study also found that more than half of the participants encountered problems with developing an argument. Yet, argumentation is one of the most significant features of academic writing (Elander et al., 2006). One of the reasons for students' difficulty in developing an argument might be a different understanding of argumentation that was acquired in their secondary education (Andrews, 1995). This result may be explained by the fact that secondary school educators in Kazakhstan mostly focus on teaching grammar and vocabulary when teaching English as a foreign language. In this regard, the study conducted by Ismail et al. (2018) with 18 Kazakhstani undergraduate students revealed that students encountered challenges because school teachers mainly emphasized grammar and vocabulary, negatively affecting students struggling with using English in real life situations, since they lacked the opportunity to acquire communication skills in their English language classroom. From my own experience, before entering Nazarbayev Intellectual School (NIS), I had only been taught grammar and vocabulary at my previous mainstream school. A possible reason for this is that students have to pass the Unified National Test (UNT) to successfully enter the university, which tests grammar and vocabulary, but not argumentation. This is consistent with data obtained in Lea and Street's (1998) study that showed that even though teachers recognized argument as the main component of successful academic writing, they found it challenging to explain the correct structure of effective argumentation. This inability to

construct an argument in their writing points to a serious insufficiency for university students and hampers their development as academic writers (Perpignan et al., 2007). Indeed, learning how to structure academic arguments provides another important privilege as it assists students in increasing their awareness of their own individual skills, encourages them to participate in group discussions, and helps them to organize their thoughts as they relate to academia.

Interestingly, interview extracts also revealed that students struggled to include their authorial “voice” in their writings. The authorial voice is a crucial component of every piece of writing that helps the reader to understand the writer’s position and opinion about one particular issue. Moreover, it is important for the writer to demonstrate their contribution and clarify the importance of their thoughts. It is “how we position ourselves in relation to our communities” (Hyland, 2008, p.6). The challenges with authorial “voice” found in the current study might be explained by students’ unawareness of its importance for producing successful writing, and its specific usages because this has not been clearly stated to them (Street, 2009). In view of the importance of authorial voice in academic writing, this is one aspect that students should start to be instructed on right after entering university and has possible implications for curriculum development and classroom practice both in university classes as well as higher level school classes.

Finding 2

It was found that the challenges connected with vocabulary negatively affected the students’ ability to “write beautifully” and to “sound more academic” as they perceive they have to write, based on their previous learning experiences.

This refers to the participants’ understanding of academic writing and academic

language being closely related to the domain of the social sciences. In particular, students from Kazakh-medium of instruction (KMI) schools indicated that they struggle with vocabulary, namely finding appropriate words, which had a negative impact on their ability to “write beautifully” and “sound more academic”. A possible explanation for this might be that their understanding of academic language is connected with the need to “write beautifully”, and use synonyms, paraphrases, metaphors, and other linguistic devices because of their previous experiences at school. In this regard, their previous experiences of academic writing were only in the Kazakh language, and they were taught to include as many complex and sophisticated words as possible to make their writing of good quality as it is a common feature of the Kazakh language. However, this feature differs from the sparser writing style of English; thus, due to this faulty perception of academic writing from their previous experiences in the Kazakh language, they perceive academic writing in the English language as a challenging task and consider it as one where they should “sound academic” and “write beautifully”.

These results reflect those of Halliday and Martin (1993) who also proposed that academic language is associated with “scientific language”. From a scientific point of view, this means that an academic language construct consists of a rich and specialized vocabulary and discursive structures that correspond to a certain area of context (Bailey, 2007; Lemke, 1990; Perez-Gonzalez, 2019). This particular issue can be explained by the fact that one of the characteristics of the field of study is the necessity of employing academic language, which is complex and represents a skill that is acquired through practice and experience.

This finding where students have an understanding of academic writing as something sophisticated that requires “beautiful writing” might corroborate, to a certain extent, with other international studies which define the term academic writing as a “specialist language”

(Christ, 1996), “advanced literacy” (Colombi, 2002), and “scientific language” (Halliday & Martin, 1993). Moreover, it is consistent with data obtained by Bailey (2007), who states that academic writing includes complicated grammatical structures and the acquisition of specialized vocabulary. It is important to note that the participants of this study are first-year undergraduate students who entered the university without these aforementioned skills, or the knowledge of the methods involved to write beautifully and academically. Thus, it is only now that they are going through the process of learning how to do this, which means that their university writings are not yet adequate.

These findings may help us to understand the fact that academic writing is a significant challenge for many first-year undergraduate students, an implication of which could be for education authorities and policy-makers to create “academic writing” as a school subject as university entrants who lack academic writing skills suffer the consequences of the lower quality of their writing, which can affect their grades and grade point average. It is crucial that sufficient attention be paid to the writing of students along with the other language skills they are expected to master in school. Moreover, teachers both at schools and universities should explain to their students what academic writing is in the English language, and consider their linguistic repertoire to understand the correlation between their previous writing experience and current academic writing knowledge in order to tailor specific writing tasks to their students. This implication is supported by Pineteh (2014) who added that the curriculum “should create space for intensive academic reading and writing activities which allow for experimentation with different writing challenges” (p. 20).

RQ2. What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges?

This section analyses the findings on the factors that cause undergraduate students' academic writing challenges while studying at an EMI university. There were several factors that the majority of students considered to be the cause of the challenges they encounter and that affect their academic writing. These factors are connected to low English language proficiency, their inadequate prior learning experiences that failed to prepare them for the academic writing that is expected of them in university, and an insufficient level of interaction with their instructors and peers.

Finding 3

The majority of students pointed to their insufficient prior experiences learning in the English language as an important factor in their academic writing difficulties.

This is a crucial finding because almost all participants of the present study identified their low English language proficiency as being a consequence of their insufficient prior experience with the English language. Students perceive this as one of the most important factors affecting their writing. Another interrelated reason for this might be that English is their second language. Students' low language proficiency is a barrier to students who are striving to develop their academic writing skills. According to Al Badi's (2015) findings, "Low language proficiency might . . . obstruct academic writing" (p. 67). This leads to the idea that poor English proficiency negatively affects students' academic success (Al Murshidi, 2014; Singh, 2017). In contrast, second language (L2) writing proficiency would therefore play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of L2 writing products (Cumming, 2006; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). Yet, students' low English language proficiency and resulting lack of appropriate technical and general vocabulary could limit their ability to convey complex ideas

in their academic writings (Fukao & Fujii, 2001). Such students tend to make more lexical and grammatical mistakes in their written texts since this process requires a large amount of these linguistic items to be present in their working memory, which is challenging for students with low L2 language proficiency to acquire (Kellogg, 1996).

The students clearly identified the lack of previous training and experience in academic writing as the main factor causing their limited knowledge of academic writing. This coincides with Al Badi's (2015) international study which identified the academic writing difficulties of ESL learners and the factors causing these challenges. Similarly, to the students in the current study, Al Badi's (2015) student participants pointed to a lack of previous knowledge of academic writing as the main factor that contributed to the difficulties they encountered in this type of writing. Similar findings were reported in the research study conducted by Al-Mukdad (2019) where students' lack of background knowledge about writing academically was believed to be the major reason for their challenges in academic writing. To conclude, a lack of training in academic writing in both the Kazakhstani and international contexts mentioned above shows not only the commonality of this feature, but its effects. This could have important implications for classroom practices in the higher grades of EMI schools where students should begin to learn about the requirements and characteristics of academic writing to avoid the disadvantages, they are now experiencing upon entering university.

Finding 4

Insufficient interaction with and feedback from instructors was a factor that prevented some students from improving their academic English writing.

Another factor that was also reported by some participants occurs when there is a lack of interaction in the form of feedback from their instructors. Obviously, feedback is a crucial

element that increases the quality of students' academic writing. Hence, the lack of such feedback increases the writing challenges of learners (Colwell et al., 2011). In many cases, instructors and professors lack the time to provide detailed feedback on their students' written works. This might be because of constraints imposed by their workload (Colwell et al., 2011). Yet, due to the resulting lack of feedback and guidance, most students struggle as they try to develop their writing skills. Moreover, some instructors concentrate only on the content of the assignments instead of the actual writing techniques (Colwell et al., 2011). This is a situation that could result in students encountering several challenges when endeavoring to produce good quality writing. Similarly, to the context of this study, in Ravichandran et al.'s (2017) findings, international graduate students reported that they received insufficient feedback from their professors. Within the Kazakhstani context, this finding can be explained by the traditional mindset of students feeling restrained from challenging authorities, in this case, their professors, thus, relying on whatever feedback they receive from them, whether sufficient or not. Hence, when students hesitate to ask questions to their instructors and do not receive the guidance that would have strengthened their academic writing difficulties, they continue to face challenges in their academic writing tasks.

These findings may help us to understand the factors that might cause undergraduate students' academic writing challenges. In fact, they are all interrelated and consequential to each other. A lack of training and practice in academic writing results in students who lack the knowledge of and experience in this kind of writing, ultimately producing university students with low academic writing proficiencies. These are the students who would benefit greatly from quality interaction and feedback from their instructors, but when this is lacking or is insufficient, the problems related to low English academic writing abilities remain. An

implication of this could be to revisit the curriculum of schools so that students in the higher grades receive instruction in academic writing. Another implication could involve individual consultations where students could receive feedback from their instructors and the opportunity to ask questions to help enhance their academic writing skills.

RQ3. How do students cope with these challenges?

It was important to explore this research question to see whether undergraduate students have strategies that help them to deal with their challenges and consequently improve the quality of their writing. This section interprets the findings on the strategies that students use to cope with the academic writing challenges they encounter. It refers to the fact that almost all participants use various strategies that help them to improve their writing and overcome their academic writing challenges. The main strategies include brainstorming and organizing their ideas, broadening their vocabulary, conducting peer feedback, and taking into account their instructor's feedback.

Finding 5

The majority of students indicated that they employ the techniques of brainstorming and of organizing their ideas as an aid to their writing.

In this regard, this is a most significant finding as such strategies concerning brainstorming and organizing ideas greatly assist students in producing quality writings. Indeed, brainstorming can be considered a helpful strategy in “generating more ideas, stimulating new ideas, expanding the vision of thinking, activating previous knowledge, reviewing more words” (Wang, 2008, p. 75). Similarly, Maarof and Murat (2013) claimed that students can simplify their writing processes by using a brainstorming and organizational strategy, since this way they will concentrate more on conveying their ideas rather than

thinking about which additional bits of information to acquire in order to continue their writing. Indeed, Abdulkareem (2013) stated that teaching students how to brainstorm can remedy their problems with academic writing. Hence, despite the difficulties the students at this university are experiencing in their academic writing assignments, they are utilizing a strategy that is commonly used to facilitate the writing process, and which, time and again, has been shown to effectively enhance the quality of their writing.

Finding 6

Students increasing their vocabulary has been mentioned as being one of their main strategies to improve their writing.

In the current study, students perceive the importance of increasing their vocabulary. This is another main strategy they employ to enhance their writing. This might be explained by the fact that the size of students' vocabulary becomes evident in their language use, especially in their writing (Laufer & Nation, 1995). Hence, Nation (2001) claimed that if learners increase their academic vocabulary in L2, this can contribute to higher rankings of their academic written assignments. In a similar vein, professors evaluating non-native speaker students' academic writing found that lexical errors were one of these students' most serious problems in their work (Santos, 1988). The results are consistent with those of Rabab'ah (2003) who conducted a study with Arab students where students had been advised to utilize extensive reading to expand their vocabulary and strengthen their academic writing in their reading courses. Therefore, by broadening their academic vocabulary, students would improve and enhance the quality of their written works. This highlights the fact that the students of the present study are aware of the importance of mastering the lexical items of academic English

and have started on the path of becoming more fluent in their writing. They recognize the increased lexis of their repertoire as key to enhanced academic writing.

Finding 7

Peer and instructor feedback, for some students, was a technique that assisted them in improving their academic writing.

Another important finding was that several students perceived the practice of peer feedback as an effective technique in improving their writing. This can be explained by the fact that students who practice giving and receiving peer-feedback are more likely to benefit from each other, especially those students whose level of writing proficiency has begun to increase; thus, the peer-editing process can help them to receive constructive and efficient feedback on grammar, vocabulary, content, and organization. As a consequence, students who work collaboratively with their peers receive higher grades and produce works with higher grammatical accuracy than students who work independently (Mulligan & Garofalo, 2011). Another possible explanation for this might be that strategies involved in peer learning are aligned with modern theories of cognitive learning (Barkley et al., 2004; Hooper et al., 2011), since this is a process that submerges learners in the assessment procedure, encourages an approach to deep learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005), and enables some key ideas of inner motivation, such as the gamification of learning, recognition, reflection, and cooperation to arise.

This finding has important implications for classroom instruction and highlights the importance of developing curricula where the space for peer learning is present. One strategy to promote peer learning could be for instructors to include group projects as well as peer review exercises as regular components of their lessons. The knowledge stemming from

research that shows that this is perceived by students as being beneficial to the development of their academic writing strategies is crucial and highlights the necessity of developing courses where these students can feel better supported and guided in the development of their academic writing abilities.

Another strategy that has proved useful in coping with students' academic writing difficulties is their attention to the feedback they receive from their instructors. In cases where such feedback is effective and perceived as relevant, it serves as a guide to improved academic writing. This finding corroborates the idea of Johnson et al.'s (2019), who suggested that an effective way of producing a quality writing is achieved through the guidance of and feedback from knowledgeable instructors. Moreover, instructors' feedback on students' writing assignments can enhance their self-efficacy as well as ensuring their high writing achievement (Ruegg, 2014). This is because instructors who provide feedback to the students in their classes focus on the type of guidance that will enable the latter to improve specific aspects of their writing. In academic writing classes, the focus of the feedback is, by default, on the academic writing style. Hence, it is imperative that students take into account and address the feedback provided for them to develop their writing skills. Students who perceive their instructors' feedback as effective and beneficial understand its value and will therefore apply this guidance to their writing tasks. This is a way for students to view the types of mistakes they make in their writing, and to learn from them in order to improve subsequent academic writing works. This strategy is therefore an effective one that is used by students striving to overcome their challenges they face in academic writing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter, the purpose of which was to interpret the findings in relation to previous research, has three sections representing the research questions that were posed in the study. Firstly, some academic writing challenges undergraduate students encounter while studying at an EMI university include difficulties related to the mechanics of writing like issues of insufficient vocabulary and an inadequate knowledge of grammar as well as a limited ability to cite and format their works, which reflects the results of other studies conducted in the international context. The lack of authorial voice and argumentation skills was found to be another disadvantage such students experienced, which prevented them from writing fluently, academically and “beautifully”. These are challenges that have been caused by certain factors that are mostly related to a lack of previous experiences with academic writing in the English language, and in some cases, not enough interaction and feedback from instructors. However, to offset the issues mentioned above, some coping strategies were identified. Therefore, through such strategies as brainstorming and organizing their work, students see a way to improve their writing. Additionally, as they perceive their low vocabulary levels as being a factor that has hindered them from producing quality written work, they have endeavored to expand their vocabulary. Moreover, the use of feedback from peers and their instructors, when properly conducted, has been perceived as another improvement strategy to improve their academic writing. The next chapter is the final one and presents some general conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The current research attempts to explore the academic writing challenges that first-year undergraduate students encounter while studying at an EMI university in Kazakhstan, along with the factors that cause these challenges and their strategies to cope with them. Hence, to fulfill the requirements of this study, the data were collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 first-year undergraduate students majoring in humanities within the School of Science and Humanities in an EMI university in Kazakhstan. This concluding chapter provides a summary of the significant conclusions reached from the discussed findings that were guided by the following research questions: 1) What are the academic writing challenges faced by a group of undergraduate students at an EMI university in Kazakhstan as perceived by them? 2) What are the factors that cause students' academic writing challenges? and 3) How do students cope with these challenges? In addition, the implications for stakeholders, the limitations of this particular research and recommendations for future research are described and laid out at the end of the chapter.

Main Conclusions of the Study

The findings pertinent to question one revealed that Kazakhstani first-year undergraduate students often encounter challenges with academic writing as they lack the academic vocabulary that would enable them to “write beautifully” and “sound more academic”. Along with these lexical difficulties, issues related to inadequate grammar knowledge presented another significant challenge. Furthermore, a number of students indicated that appropriate formatting and citations are difficult skills for them to master. Further, a few students find it difficult to develop an argument due to the absence of their authorial voice, a lack of paraphrasing skills, and difficulties elaborating their ideas.

Importantly, and in response to the second research question, this study revealed that the participants of the current study highlighted that these difficulties could be attributed to two principal factors. The first factors refer to previous learning experiences in English academic writing that were insufficient, resulting in low English language proficiency and a transfer of the mother tongue when writing in the second language. The other main factor was largely related to the insufficient level of students' interaction with their instructors, and in some cases, a lack of guidance and feedback from the latter.

In reference to the above findings, the participants were asked about the strategies they use to overcome their academic writing challenges, and a number of strategies which could help Kazakhstani students improve their level of academic writing were proposed. One of the suggested remedial strategies was to broaden their vocabulary to improve their language skills. Additionally, the students indicated that several strategies such as brainstorming and organizing their ideas would help enhance their writing. Furthermore, conducting peer feedback, as well as working with their instructor's feedback were recognized as the strategies that help students to produce quality writing tasks.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

The study has several limitations that should be taken into account. The limited time for the research did not allow for more participants and research sites to be featured in the study. Furthermore, having more than one data collection instrument, would have provided additional support for the findings revealed in this study. Moreover, some other limitations of the present study are related to the interview questions and criteria for participants' recruitment.

First of all, the results that were based on 10 students' responses cannot be generalized to all EMI university students in Kazakhstan; 10 students can not represent the perceptions of all EMI university students in the country. Moreover, this study was conducted at only one research site, an EMI university located in Nur-Sultan. However, it would have been more effective to conduct the research in two or more EMI universities and compare the perceptions of the first-year undergraduate students from those universities. This would have helped us determine whether there is a difference in their perceptions and their challenges and could have provided a deeper insight into this phenomenon. Another limitation is that the single data collection instrument that was employed, i.e., semi-structured interviews, could have been triangulated and supplemented by other research instruments such as class observation and a document analysis of the writings of students from different educational backgrounds. It would also have been useful to compare and contrast the similarities and differences of the challenges faced by these students and attempt to reveal the reasons for them by referring to similar data from international studies. In addition, the interview questions of the current study did not completely answer the research questions. For example, during the first interviews, the researcher noticed that several questions were repeated and thus modified the remaining interviews with other students. In this regard, more appropriately created questions for semi-structured interviews would have assisted the researcher in revealing more comprehensive data.

Recommendations for Future Research and for Policy

While the research findings have provided an understanding of the Kazakhstani undergraduate students' experience with academic writing in EMI universities, there is a need for more studies. This section dwells on the recommendations that the researcher finds

valuable and that could be suitable for future research and stakeholders in the education system.

First, this research was not aimed at generalizing the present study's findings to the whole Kazakhstani undergraduate student population, rather it attempted to show only a few experiences with academic writing. Thus, conducting only qualitative research is insufficient for this topic; therefore, a quantitative or mixed method research studying the connection between academic writing and academic success is needed. Consequently, researchers could recruit more students and utilize a large sample of EMI students from different universities, including EMI or universities not providing all classes in English. A quantitative study might provide more objective results regarding the influence of academic writing on academic success.

Second, this study was analyzed based on undergraduate students' perspectives and experiences. Further studies may focus on the perceptions of graduate students, faculty, and writing instructors to explore the issue from different perspectives. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to investigate the extent to which writing instructors play a significant role in the academic writing of university students.

Regarding educational policies for the Kazakhstani Ministry of Education, it is suggested to provide more academic writing classes in Kazakhstan, including in secondary and higher education because if students were taught academic writing at their school before enrolling in universities, they would avoid spending time learning this skill upon reaching higher education and would provide them the opportunity to start producing quality writing immediately upon entering university. The students of this study found argumentation challenging and had difficulties expressing their views in an academic writing style. This issue

is significant as university students are expected to analyze and critique phenomena, which is an indicator of their ability to develop and support written arguments. This highlights the fact that argumentation should be taught at school to prepare students for university since this skill is just as important as vocabulary and grammar in academic writing, the latter two of which seem to be the predominant focus in English classes in schools. Moreover, to expose more Kazakhstani students to academic writing, the government should hire more native English teachers to teach these students academic writing at the university level.

Overall, although this research has provided crucial information regarding the experience of undergraduate students with academic writing in an EMI setting, the limitations of this study point to ways to further widen this knowledge. It also provides recommendations that can help to further research on the phenomenon and alleviate the problems many students experience with writing academically in the English language.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocols in English, Russian, and Kazakh

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Researcher: Arailym Ablazimova

Participant: Student

The Individual Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire:

a) Warm-up:

How are you? Are you ready for the interview?

b) Background questions:

1. First of all, I would like to know about your previous experience at school. Can you tell me the language you studied in before at school?
2. As you know today, we are going to talk about academic writing. So, have you heard the term academic writing before? Can you give me the definition? In your mind, how do you understand the term academic writing?
3. How often did you use academic writing at school?
4. What writing assignments were you given at school, and are you currently working with?
5. Can you please tell me about your perceptions of studying through English as a medium of instruction?

c) Guiding questions about writing assignments:

6. *Main:* Do you find writing assignments in English difficult? Why or why not?

Probing: What writing assignments do you find the most difficult? Essay, academic paper, reflection, etc.?

7. When you get an assignment, what are your steps?

d) Guiding questions about academic writing difficulties:

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

9. Do you find academic writing a difficult process? Why or why not?

e) Guiding questions about factors:

10. Based on your academic writing learning experience, what are the factors or reasons that make academic writing a difficult skill to achieve?

11. *Main:* Do you think that factors such as low proficiency in the second language or prior knowledge affects your ability to write academic assignments?

Probing: What about the first language transfer to a second language? It is when you unconsciously think about a first language while writing in L2.

Probing: Does your instructor's feedback affect your writing in your second language? If yes, how?

Probing: Is there any other factor you think affects your academic writing in your second language?

f) Guiding questions about strategies:

12. How do you cope with the academic writing challenges you are faced with?

13. Can you offer any suggestions to overcome these difficulties in order to make English academic writing a smooth process?
 14. *Main:* What do you usually do to deal with academic writing difficulties?
Probing: What strategies or techniques are you doing right now to help yourself with these problems in writing?
- g) General questions about academic writing level and English proficiency
15. Do you think there are any differences comparing your academic writing skills today and when you just joined the program?
 16. *Main:* Are you motivated to enhance your English proficiency at this point?
Probing: If yes, what are your current language learning goals and how do you plan to achieve them (i.e., strategies to achieve these goals)?
- h) Closing question:
17. Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you very much for your time!
- i) Wrap-up:
Now, it is almost the end of our interview. Thank you for your participation! I appreciate your interest and time! I guarantee that all information will be used only for our study and will be kept confidential. Thank you very much!

а) Организация:

Как ваши дела? Вы готовы к интервью?

б) Общие вопросы:

1. Прежде всего, я хотел бы узнать о вашем предыдущем опыте в школе. Можете ли вы рассказать, на каком языке вы учились раньше в школе?
2. Как вы знаете, сегодня мы поговорим о навыках академической письменной речи. Итак, вы слышали термин «академическое письмо» раньше? Можете дать определение? На ваш взгляд, как вы понимаете термин «академическое письмо»?
3. Как часто вы использовали академическое письмо в школе?
4. Какие письменные задания вам давали в школе, над которыми вы и сейчас работаете?
5. Не могли бы вы рассказать мне о своем понимании изучения английского языка как средства обучения?

в) Наводящие вопросы по написанию заданий:

6. *Основной:* Вам трудно выполнять письменные задания по английскому языку? Почему да или почему нет?
Дополнительный: Какие письменные задания вы считаете самыми трудными? Эссе, академическая работа, размышление и т. д.?
7. Когда вы получаете задание, каковы ваши действия?

г) Наводящие вопросы о трудностях академического письма:

8. С какими основными недостатками и/или трудностями вы столкнулись при написании заданий?
9. Считаете ли вы академическую письменную речь сложным процессом? Почему да или почему нет?

д) Наводящие вопросы о факторах:

10. Основываясь на вашем опыте обучения академическому письму, каковы факторы или причины, из-за которых трудно овладеть навыком академического письма?
11. *Основной:* Считаете ли вы, что такие факторы, как низкий уровень владения вторым языком или предшествующие знания, влияют на ваши навыки академической письменной речи?
Дополнительный: Как насчет перевода первого языка на второй язык? Это когда вы неосознанно думаете о родном языке, когда пишете на L2.
Дополнительный: влияет ли отзыв вашего преподавателя на ваши письменные навыки на иностранном языке? Если да, то как?
Дополнительный: Есть ли какой-либо другой фактор, который, по вашему мнению, влияет на ваши навыки академической письменной речи на дополнительном языке?

е) Наводящие вопросы о стратегиях:

12. Как вы справляетесь с трудностями при использовании академической письменной речи?
13. Можете ли вы внести какие-либо предложения по преодолению этих трудностей, чтобы сделать использование академической письменной речи на английском языке менее проблемной?
14. *Основной:* Что вы обычно делаете, чтобы справиться с трудностями, возникающими при использовании академической письменной речи?

Дополнительный: Какие стратегии или приемы вы используете сейчас, чтобы справляться самостоятельно с этими проблемами?

ё) Общие вопросы об уровне академического письма и владении английским языком

15. Как вы думаете, есть ли разница между вашими навыками академического письма на данный момент и на момент, когда вы только приступили к обучению в данной программе?

16. *Основной:* Вы заинтересованы в повышении уровня владения английским языком на данный момент?

Дополнительный: если да, каковы ваши текущие цели в изучении языка и как вы планируете их достичь (т. е. стратегии для достижения этих целей)?

ж) Заключительный вопрос:

17. Есть ли что-нибудь еще, что вы хотели бы добавить? Большое спасибо за уделенное время!

з) Подведение итогов:

Итак, это почти конец нашего интервью. Спасибо за ваше участие! Я ценю ваш интерес и время! Я гарантирую, что вся информация будет использована только для нашего исследования и останется конфиденциальной. Большое спасибо!

а) Ұйымдастыру:

Қалыңыз қалай? Сіз сұхбатқа дайынсыз ба?

ә) Жалпы сұрақтар:

1. Біріншіден, мен сіздің мектептегі бұрынғы тәжірибеңіз туралы білгім келеді. Мектепте бұрын қай тілде оқығаныңызды айта аласыз ба?

2. Өздеріңіз білетіндей, бүгін біз академиялық жазу туралы сөйлесетін боламыз. Сонымен, сіз «академиялық жазу» терминін бұрын естідіңіз бе? Анықтама бере аласыз ба? Сіздің ойыңызша, «академиялық жазу» деген не?

3. Мектепте академиялық жазуды қаншалықты жиі қолдандыңыз?

4. Мектепте сізге қандай жазбаша тапсырмалар берілді және сіз қазір академиялық жазумен жұмыс істеп жатырсыз ба?

5. Ағылшын тілін үйренудің құралы ретінде қабылдау туралы пікіріңізді айтып бере аласыз ба?

б) Жазбаша тапсырмалар бойынша жетекші сұрақтар:

6. *Негізгі:* Ағылшын тілінде жазбаша тапсырмаларды орындау қиынға соғады ма? Неге?

Қосымша: Сізге қандай жазу тапсырмалары қиын деп есептейсіз? Эссе, оқу жұмысы, рефлексия т.б.?

7. Тапсырманы алған кезде сіздің әрекеттеріңіз қандай?

в) Академиялық жазудың қиындықтары туралы жетекші сұрақтар:

8. Тапсырмаларды жазу кезінде қандай негізгі кемшіліктер және/немесе қиындықтар кездесті?

9. Сізге академиялық жазу қиын ба? Неге?

г) Факторларға қатысты жетекші сұрақтар:

10. Академиялық жазуды үйретудегі тәжірибеңізге сүйене отырып, академиялық жазуды меңгеруді қиындататын факторлар немесе себептер қандай?

11. *Негізгі:* Сіздің ойыңызша, екінші тілді төмен меңгеру немесе алдыңғы білім сияқты факторлар сіздің академиялық тапсырмаларды жазу қабілетіңізге әсер етеді ме?

Қосымша: Бірінші тілді екінші тілге аудару туралы не айтасыз? Бұл сіз екінші тілде жазғанда бейсаналық түрде ана тіліңізді ойлау процессіңіз.

Қосымша: Сіздің ұстазыңыздың/жетекшіңіздің пікірі сіздің екінші тілдегі жазуыңызға әсер ете ме? Егер солай болса, қалай?

Қосымша: Сіздің екінші тілдегі академиялық жазуыңызға әсер ететін басқа фактор бар ма?

д) Стратегиялар бойынша жетекші сұрақтар:

12. Сіз кездесетін академиялық жазу қиындықтарымен қалай күресесіз?

13. Ағылшын тілінде академиялық жазуды жеңіл ету үшін осы қиындықтарды жеңу бойынша қандай да бір ұсыныстар бере аласыз ба?

14. *Негізгі:* Сіз әдетте академиялық жазудағы қиындықтарды жеңу үшін не істейсіз?

Қосымша: Осы мәселелерді жазбаша түрде шешуге көмектесу үшін дәл қазір қандай стратегияларды немесе әдістерді қолданасыз?

е) Академиялық жазу деңгейі мен ағылшын тілін меңгеру туралы жалпы сұрақтар:

15. Сіздің академиялық жазу дағдыларыңыздың бүгінгі күні мен бағдарламаға алғаш қосылған кездегі деңгейіңізбен айырмашылығы бар деп ойлайсыз ба?

16. *Негізгі:* Сіздің қазіргі уақытта ағылшын тілін меңгеру деңгейін арттыруға құлшынысыңыз бар ма?

Қосымша: Иә болса, тіл үйренудегі қазіргі мақсаттарыңыз қандай және оларға қалай жетуді жоспарлайсыз (яғни, сол мақсаттарға жету стратегиялары)?

ж) Қорытынды сұрақ:

17. Сіз қосқыңыз келетін тағы бір нәрсе бар ма? Уақытыңызды бөліп келгеніңізге көп рахмет!

з) Қорытындылау:

Сонымен, сұхбатымыз аяқталуға жақын. Қатысқаныңызға рахмет! Мен сіздің қызығушылығыңыз бен уақытыңызды бағалаймын! Мен барлық ақпарат тек біздің зерттеуіміз үшін пайдаланылатынына және құпия сақталатынына кепілдік беремін. Үлкен рахмет!

Appendix B

Transcription Sample of Interview 1 in English

The Individual Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire

a) Warm-up:

Researcher: How are you? Are you ready for the interview?

Student: I am fine and ready for the interview.

b) Background questions:

1. *Main:* First of all, I would like to know about your previous experience at school. Can you tell me the language you studied in before at school?

Student: Actually, I am not from schools like NIS, KTL, or others. I am from ordinary school. We were taught through Kazakh and Russian languages. We didn't have anything like academic writing or research courses that other schools might have. I think this is one of the challenges I am currently facing during my university life that I haven't experienced academic writing in my school years.

2. As you know today, we are going to talk about academic writing. So, have you heard the term academic writing before? Can you give me the definition? In your mind, how do you understand the term academic writing?

Student: Actually, I have a stereotype that academic writing is all about advanced words, that only academic people can write these works and that students are not capable to write, including myself. But, after having the course about academic writing, I know that it is more about explaining, convincing, giving your own arguments. Also having your own opinion and trying to share this opinion in academic writings.

3. How often did you use academic writing at school?

Student: I think we didn't use them. There were essays, but there wasn't that strict structure as in academic writings. You didn't have to explain everything or giving your arguments. There were then answers to some historical questions, but I don't think they were something like academic writings.

4. What writing assignments were you given at school, and are you currently working with?

Student: Essays, writings about literature, about some novels. Then, essays in Kazakh. I don't know, it seems there were topics not for essays. You didn't have to explain, convince, or prove something. It wasn't that difficult and strict in structure. Currently I am not working at all, because now we are having our winter holiday. But we worked on argumentative essays and research paper, but they are both kind of similar assignments. Then we had bibliography, like working with sources.

5. Can you please tell me about your perceptions of studying through English as a medium of instruction?

Student: I don't think that the perception was difficult for me. Because I have a good understanding of English. Maybe that was difficult for me to speak up and to write in some different way, to use different words and to be more fluence in writing. But with perception there were no difficulties.

c) Guiding questions about writing assignments:

6. *Main:* Do you find writing assignments in English difficult? Why or why not?

Student: I don't think that the language is a problem. But I think that other factors and criteria of essays of academic papers were difficult for me, not the language. Writing in Kazakh is more difficult than writing in English. For that reason, I would compare it with Russian. It is easier for me to write in Russian. If the language is more convenient for me to use and I know how to sound neutral and which words to use. I think in comparison, writing in English is more difficult than writing in Russian.

Probing: What writing assignments do you find the most difficult? Essay, academic paper, reflection, etc.?

Student: I think that reflections are not that difficult. Because you don't have to come up with arguments and your opinion, and convince your reader, in our case it's our professor. But academic papers are hard, because of the strict structure. So, academic papers are the most challenging for me.

7. When you get an assignment, what are your steps?

Student: Actually, I am not a good student, I am more like a procrastinator. First of all, I get familiar with the work, like what I have to do, what time am I given, and in what time I am able to write this. I start the writing only after I explore the rubrics and instructions and topic of the particular task. There are mandatory office-hours, where you are obliged to bring your drafts. So, its kinds of drives me to work on drafts. Then, I start working on my drafts. It got interesting while writing. Then I participate in office-hours and get some feedback for my work. After I finished with office-hours and mandatory thing, I forgot about this work till the next mandatory deadline.

d) Guiding questions about academic writing difficulties:

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

Student: Actually, I have average grades. But I know my own mistakes. In my fist work, I have mentioned the absence of my own voice as an author while citing, and while coding other authors. In the second work, my problem was on elaborating and explaining things. Because of this some parts of my writing could look unclear for some readers. They are two main problems of my works.

9. Do you find academic writing a difficult process? Why or why not?

Student: I think so. Because university makes academic writing too serious. When you have the course about the academic writing, it gets more serious. You like perceive it as a serious big thing and try to run away from it. I think we have a fear against academic papers in our minds.

e) Guiding questions about factors:

10. Based on your academic writing learning experience, what are the factors or reasons that make academic writing a difficult skill to achieve?

Student: I had a fear if I say something without citations, people won't believe me. That's why I add a lot of citations and coding. The second thing was that, if I know the theme, and I am writing from my side, but my reader can't not know about my topic, and that will be hard to understand. So, I thought that I have to explain and justify each statement I write.

11. *Main:* Do you think that factors such as low proficiency in the second language or prior knowledge affects your ability to write academic assignments?

Student: Yes, definitely. Because, as I mentioned before, I am from the ordinary school. Mostly, students at my university are from the privileged schools where education is more

qualified. They have more experience about academic writing and have a good level of English. They already have the necessary habits for this type of universities.

Probing: What about the first language transfer to a second language? It is when you unconsciously think about a first language while writing in L2.

Student: I don't think so. Personally, I don't transfer from one language to other language. Maybe only when brainstorming I would do so, but while writing I don't do this. I don't think that it's a problem.

Probing: Does your instructor's feedback affect your writing in your second language? If yes, how?

Student: Feedbacks are always beneficial. Because I don't bring full and completed works, I don't receive such full feedback from my instructor. However, I think that instructor's feedback affects positively to your way of writing and has more advantages than disadvantages.

Probing: Is there any other factor you think affects your academic writing in your second language?

Student: I can add something. It is fluency. I have a thought that I must write advanced words even if it's not necessary. That's my problem. Another problem, while writing, I notice that I use too simple words even if they are suitable. Then I feel that they will affect to my grades.

f) Guiding questions about strategies:

12. How do you cope with the academic writing challenges you are faced with?

Student: Maybe it's because of rationale thinking. I can't replace this word, because even if I find some words they will not fit there. Also, I have mentioned that I write works very close to the deadlines, I don't have a time to think over that. Actually, I didn't do anything about that. I try it, but always its similar. I don't do changes. Its like you work on smith very hard because of decline, and you waste all your energy. And after this work you have to relax, and then while you are relaxing, another decline comes up. You again waste all your energy in other deadline, and you have to relax. Because your brain was under a great pressure. And it's like a cycle. But, now I am thinking not be this person in the second semester. Because I had a lot of problems about procrastination. I am now working on that.

13. Can you offer any suggestions to overcome these difficulties in order to make English academic writing a smooth process?

Student: I think the first thing is not see something big or something serious from academic writings and be more relaxed. And that is why, if you don't see a problem, you don't run away from them. That's the first thing I would advise. The second thing, its helpful to have your mates who can read your works, and give feedbacks. That really helps, because you don't have an opportunity to always have the feedback of the professor. They have their own office hours, and it doesn't always fit your schedule. And don't blame on yourself. Because really, you don't have to put a lot of pressure on yourself. Instead you should start your writing. You should try.

14. What strategies or techniques are you doing right now to help yourself with these problems in writing?

Student: I think its more working, focusing on our brainstorming. Write your thoughts. Because when you put all your thoughts on the paper, and work on these thoughts. It then helps you edit that, add and remove unnecessary ideas.

g) General questions about academic writing level and English proficiency

15. Do you think there are any differences comparing your academic writing skills today and when you just joined the program?

Student: Yes. Because I have my right definition of academic papers. And I am not that afraid of these works and papers. And I can write not easily yes, let's be honest.

16. *Main:* Are you motivated to enhance your English proficiency at this point?

Student: Yes, of course. That's why I chose this interview to be in English. I always, even if I am afraid. But I don't think that my English bad or something. I like my English. At university, when you have to speak up, you have this pressure, that is difficult to say what is perfect in your mind and to put it in words, it sounds something different. It sounds like you don't know English, and that's the problem. Not the problems, you can't speak English. The problem is being in pressure, and feeling uncomfortable atmosphere. That's why I am choosing to put myself in that not comfortable situations. To get more used to that.

h) Closing question:

17. Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you very much for your time!

Student: The main point is that not to make something serious in academic papers. You don't have to run away from them. That's my main point. I want to thank you for making this research. Because I need.. There was interesting for me on winter holidays. Thank you!

i) Wrap-up:

Now, it is almost the end of our interview. Thank you for your participation! I appreciate your interest and time! I guarantee that all information will be used only for our study and will be kept confidential. Thank you very much!

Appendix C

Consent Form in English, Russian, and Kazakh

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Exploring Kazakhstani Undergraduate Students' Academic Writing Challenges at an EMI
University: A Qualitative Inquiry

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study that aims at exploring academic writing challenges that students might endure while studying through English as a medium of instruction (EMI). In particular, this study is aimed at identifying the challenges that you might face while studying through EMI and the factors that cause these challenges and strategies that you use to deal with these challenges. Your reflection on these challenges would help you to better understand the problems and find solutions to these challenges. You will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or an online interview depending on the epidemiological situation. The interview will be conducted in any of the following languages offered to your choice: English, Russian, or Kazakh . With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. This recording will be stored in a safe place and will be secured with a password; thus, only the researcher will have access to this data. Any information that is obtained in this study will be kept confidential. Therefore, your name, university identification number, and the program you are studying will be anonymous in all written and printed documents, including interview transcripts and consent forms.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation in the interview will take approximately 30-50 minutes.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are no more than minimal. The interview might create certain discomfort for you as you will reflect on the academic writing challenges you face while studying through EMI. You will have the right to skip questions that you find sensitive or do not want to answer. The university's name or other site-related information will be replaced by pseudonyms. Your names will be kept confidential, and as mentioned above, the data collected from this study will be stored in a safe place secured with a strong-level password. No information from this study will not be revealed to anyone. The time and location will be negotiated with each of you individually and will not intervene with your class time or examination period. Therefore, you will not lose any attendance scores for participating in this study. As for the benefits, your reflection on the challenges you face will give you an opportunity to reflect on your experiences and think over the ways to cope with them. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your grades at the university.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the

right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks, and benefits, please contact me at (+77025420033) and arailym.ablazimova@nu.edu.kz . Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to my Master's Thesis Supervisor, Associate Professor Sulushash Kerimkulova (skerimkulova@nu.edu.kz), tel +77759999167.

Independent Contact:

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to speak to someone independent of the research team at +7 7172 709359. You can also write an email to the NUGSE Research Committee at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz .

Please, sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

I have carefully read the information provided;

- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I give permission for this interview to be recorded.

Signed _____ Date _____

Yours sincerely,

Arailym Ablazimova arailym.ablazimova@nu.edu.kz

Signature:

Date:

ФОРМА ИНФОРМАЦИОННОГО СОГЛАСИЯ

Изучение проблем, связанных с академическим письмом у казахстанских студентов, обучающихся по программе бакалавриата в университете с английским языком обучения

ОПИСАНИЕ: Приглашаю Вас принять участие в исследовании, целью которого является изучение проблем, связанных с трудностями навыков академического письма, с которыми студенты могут столкнуться во время учебы в университетах с английским языком обучения. В частности, данное исследование направлено на определение трудностей, с которыми Вы можете столкнуться при обучении в университете с английским языком обучения, а также выявление факторов, вызывающих данные трудности, и способов, которые вы используете для решения этих проблем. Ваша рефлексия над тем, что именно вызывает у вас затруднения при освоении навыков академического письма, поможет Вам лучше понять причину проблемы и найти способы решения возникших сложностей. Вам будет предложено принять участие в индивидуальном интервью (в формате онлайн или офлайн), в зависимости от ситуации. Интервью будет проводиться на любом из следующих языков, который: английский, русский или казахский. С вашего согласия интервью будет записано на магнитофон. Аудиозапись будет храниться на устройстве, защищенном паролем. Таким образом, только исследователь будет иметь доступ к этим данным. Любая информация, полученная в ходе этого исследования, будет оставаться конфиденциальной. Следовательно, Ваше имя, идентификационный номер университета и программа обучения, останутся анонимными во всех письменных и печатных документах, включая протоколы собеседования и формы согласия.

ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ: В целом, участие в исследовании займет около 30-50 минут Вашего времени.

РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА: Риски, связанные с этим исследованием, оцениваются как совершенно минимальные. Участие в исследовании может вызвать у Вас психологический дискомфорт, так как Вы будете размышлять о трудностях, которые Вы испытываете во время учебы в университете с английским языком обучения. Для обеспечения наиболее минимального риска во время прохождения исследования, вопросы будут сформулированы таким образом, чтобы не вызвать у участников психологический дискомфорт, такие как стресс и давление. Кроме того, у Вас будет возможность пропустить вопросы, которые покажутся Вам деликатными или на которые Вы не захотите отвечать. Чтобы снизить любые потенциальные риски для любого из участников этого исследования, название университета или другая информация, относящаяся к месту исследования, будет скрыта. Будет сохранена анонимность Вашего имени, а также полученные данные будут храниться на устройстве, надежно защищенном паролем. Только исследователь будет иметь доступ к данным, собранным в ходе интервью. Информация из этого исследования не будет разглашена. Время и место будут согласованы с каждым из Вас индивидуально во внеурочный или вне экзаменационный период. Таким образом, участие в этом

исследовании не отразится на Вашей посещаемости. Что касается личной выгоды данного исследования для Вас, то размышление о сложностях, с которыми вы сталкиваетесь, поможет Вам найти способы их устранения. Решение об участии в данном исследовании не повлияет на Ваши оценки в университете.

ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКОВ: Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время без какого-либо наказания или потери предоставляемого социального пакета. В качестве альтернативы, можно отказаться от участия в исследовании. Также, Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях.

КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:

Вопросы: Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться со мной по телефонам +77025420033 и arailym.ablazimova@nu.edu.kz.

Если вы хотите задать вопросы о своих правах, как участника исследования или высказать

любые проблемы или опасения, которые могут возникнуть в связи с исследованием,

кому-либо, кроме исследователя, можете связаться с моим научным руководителем: Ассоциированным Профессором Сулушаш Керимкуловой, +77759999167, skerimkulova@nu.edu.kz

Независимые контакты: Если Вы не удовлетворены проведением данного исследования или у Вас возникли какие-либо проблемы, жалобы или вопросы, Вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета, отправив письмо на электронный адрес (resethics@nu.edu.kz).

ПОДПИСЬ УЧАСТНИКА ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

Я понимаю описанные выше процедуры. На мои вопросы были даны

удовлетворительные ответы, и я согласен участвовать в этом исследовании. Мне дали копию этой формы.

Имя участника

Подпись участника

Дата

ПОДПИСЬ ЛИЦА, ПОЛУЧАЮЩЕГО СОГЛАСИЕ

По моему мнению, участник добровольно и сознательно соглашается участвовать в этом

исследовании.

Имя лица, получающего согласие

Контактный номер

Подпись лица, получающего согласие

Дата

ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫ КЕЛІСІМІНІҢ АҚПАРАТТЫҚ ФОРМАСЫ

Ағылшын тілі оқыту құралы ретінде қолданылатын университетінде қазақстандық студенттердің академиялық жазу мәселелерін зерттеу: сапалы сауалнама

СИПАТТАМА: Сізді ағылшын тілінде оқыту құралы (EMI) ретінде оқу кезінде студенттер жолықтыратын академиялық жазу қиындықтарын зерттеуге бағытталған зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шақырамыз. Атап айтқанда, бұл зерттеу ағылшын тілінде оқыту құралы арқылы оқу кезінде кездесетін қиындықтарды және осы қиындықтарды тудыратын факторлар мен олармен күресу үшін қолданылатын стратегияларды анықтауға бағытталған. Сіздің осы қиындықтар туралы ойыңыз сізге проблемаларды жақсы түсінуге және осы қиындықтардың шешімдерін табуға көмектеседі. Сізден жағдайға байланысты бетпе-бет немесе онлайн-сұхбатқа қатысу сұралады. Сұхбат келесі тілдердің кез келгенінде жүргізіледі: ағылшын, орыс немесе қазақ тілінде. Сіздің рұқсатыңызбен сұхбат таспаға жазылады. Бұл жазба қауіпсіз жерде сақталады және парольмен қорғалады; осылайша, бұл деректерге тек зерттеуші ғана қол жеткізе алады. Бұл зерттеуде алынған кез келген ақпарат құпия сақталады. Сондықтан сіздің атыңыз, университеттің сәйкестендіру нөмірі және сіз оқып жатқан бағдарлама сұхбат жазбалары мен келісім бланкілерін қоса алғанда, барлық жазбаша және баспа құжаттарында жасырын болады.

ӨТКІЗІЛЕТІН УАҚЫТЫ: Сіздің қатысуыңыз шамамен 30-50 минут уақытыңызды алады.

ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫНА ҚАТЫСУДЫҢ ҚАУІПТЕРІ МЕН

АРТЫҚШЫЛЫҚТАРЫ: Бұл зерттеуге байланысты тәуекелдер өте аз. Зерттеу сізге белгілі бір ыңғайсыздық тудыруы мүмкін, өйткені сіз ағылшын тілі оқыту құралы (EMI) арқылы оқу кезінде қиындықтарыңыз туралы ой бөлісесіз. Бұл тәуекелді азайту үшін зерттеуші өз қатысушыларына психологиялық зиян келтірмейтіндей, стресс пен қысымды тудырмайтындай етіп сұрақтар құрастырады. Сонымен қатар, сіз сезімтал немесе жауап бергіңіз келмейтін сұрақтарды өткізіп жіберуге мүмкіндік аласыз. Осы зерттеуге қатысушылардың кез келгені үшін ықтимал тәуекелдерді азайту үшін университет атауы немесе сайтқа қатысты басқа ақпарат жасырылады. Сіздің есімдеріңіз құпия сақталады және жоғарыда айтылғандай, осы зерттеуден алынған деректер қауіпсіз деңгейдегі құпия сөзбен қорғалған жерде сақталады. Тек зерттеуші ғана сұхбаттан жиналған деректерге қол жеткізе алады. Бұл зерттеуден алынған ақпарат ешкімге ашылмайды. Уақыт пен орын әр қатысушымен жеке келісілетін болады және сіздің сабақтың уақыты мен емтихан кезеңіне сәйкес келмейді. Осылайша, сіз осы зерттеуге қатысқан кездегі сабаққа қатысу баллдарын жоғалтпайсыз. Артықшылықтарға келетін болсақ, сіздің алдыңызда кездесетін қиындықтар туралы ойлану сізге оларды жеңудің жолдарын табуға мүмкіндік береді. Сіздің бұл зерттеуге қатысу немесе қатыспау туралы шешіміңіз сіздің университеттегі бағаларыңызға әсер етпейді.

ҚАТЫСУШЫ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫ: Егер Сіз берілген формамен танысып, зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шешім қабылдасаңыз, Сіздің қатысуыңыз ерікті түрде екенін

хабарлаймыз. Сонымен қатар, қалаған уақытта айыппұл төлемей және сіздің әлеуметтік жеңілдіктеріңізге еш кесірін тигізбей зерттеу жұмысына қатысу туралы келісіміңізді кері қайтаруға немесе тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар. Зерттеу жұмысына мүлдем қатыспауыңызға да толық құқығыңыз бар. Сондай-ақ, қандай да бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуіңізге де әбден болады. Бұл зерттеу жұмысының нәтижелері академиялық немесе кәсіби мақсаттарда баспаға ұсынылуы немесе шығарылуы мүмкін.

БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТЫ:

Сұрақтарыңыз: Егер жүргізіліп отырған зерттеу жұмысының процесі, қауіп мен артықшылықтары туралы сұрағыңыз немесе шағымыңыз болса маған телефон арқылы хабарласыңыз (+77025420033) немесе arailym.ablazimova@nu.edu.kz. Басқа да сұрақтар бойынша келесі байланыс құралдары арқылы зерттеушінің магистрлық тезисі бойынша жетекшісімен хабарласуыңызға болады, Қауымдастырылған Профессор Сулушаш Керимкуловамен (+77759999167) немесе skerimkulova@nu.edu.kz.

Дербес байланыс ақпараттары: Егер берілген зерттеу жұмысының жүргізілуімен қанағаттанбасаңыз немесе сұрақтарыңыз бен шағымдарыңыз болса, Назарбаев Университеті Жоғары Білім беру мектебінің Зерттеу Комитетімен көрсетілген байланыс құралдары арқылы хабарласуыңызға болады: электрондық поштамен (resethics@nu.edu.kz).

Егер сіз осы зерттеуге қатысуға келіссеңіз, осы Келісімге қол қойыңыз.

Қолы _____ Күні _____

Мен осы сұхбатты диктофон құралдарына жазып алуға рұқсат беремін.

Қолы _____ Күні _____

Ізгі ниетпен,

Арайлым Аблазимова arailym.ablazimova@nu.edu.kz

Қолы:

Күні: