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Understanding Why Undergraduate EFL Learners Find Academic Writing Challenging

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ABSTRACT
Academic writing remains one of the most challenging skills for undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This study investigates the major factors contributing to students' difficulties in producing effective academic texts in higher education contexts. Using a qualitative library research approach, the study synthesizes findings from recent literature on second language writing, academic literacy development, and learner psychology. The analysis reveals that academic writing challenges arise from multiple interconnected factors, including limited academic vocabulary, difficulties in organizing coherent arguments, high cognitive processing demands, writing anxiety, and insufficient exposure to academic discourse practices prior to university study. The findings suggest that academic writing problems should not be viewed solely as linguistic weaknesses but as complex developmental issues involving cognitive, psychological, and institutional dimensions. The study highlights the importance of structured writing instruction, formative feedback, and scaffolded academic literacy support in helping EFL learners successfully transition into university-level writing. These insights contribute to a broader understanding of academic writing development and offer pedagogical implications for English language instructors in higher education.

Keywords: EFL learners, academic writing, writing difficulties

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Introduction

Academic writing is one of the most challenging skills that second or foreign language students are relied upon to gain as it requires the dominance of an assortment of "semantic, subjective, and sociocultural skills" (Barkaoui, 2007). To go more inside and out, academic writing has a fundamental job in "mingling understudies into the talk of subjects and trains in colleges" (Pineteh, 2014). Writing academically has consistently been significant in the field of instructing English to speakers of different Languages. One explanation is credited to the need of this aptitude in advanced education (Al Badi, 2015).

Recent research shows that academic writing challenges among EFL learners stem not only from linguistic limitations but also from discourse expectations, cognitive demands, and learner self-efficacy (Hyland, 2019; Teng, 2021; Lee, 2020). For Many adult ESL learners find writing in academic English a challenging task. Hardly any adult ESL students have had a lot of experience Academic writing English. Not exclusively should these ESL understudies gain capability in syntax, mechanics, jargon, and other surface-level parts of English piece, they should ace American as well as British logical styles and academic writing classes.

The ESL student's capacity to write in Academic writing might be affected by elements, for example, writing style, inspiration, tension over articulation, a temporarily uncooperative mind, and other passionate variables. ESL understudies' local language proficiency foundations and encounters are likewise significant in the advancement of their Academic writing. (Hind Al Fadda, 2012). Furthermore, learners' writing performance is strongly influenced by vocabulary knowledge and their ability to access appropriate academic lexical resources. Without sufficient vocabulary depth, students often struggle to express complex arguments and maintain clarity in scholarly communication (Nation, 2022)

Academic writing plays a fundamental role in socializing students into the disciplinary discourse of university subjects. In any case, with the massification of advanced education, numerous

understudies such as in numerous South African Universities of Technology are attempting to keep up academic writing principles that are worthy in advanced education. This has expanded the interest for scholarly improvement programs as a feasible methodology to upgrade the Academic writing aptitudes and other delicate abilities required by understudies (Pineteh, 2014).

Poor scholarly execution and high disappointment rates in Indonesia tertiary foundations have lead to a requirement for intercession or something to that affect. Scholastic execution is said to be firmly impacted by one's academic writing capacity. Along these lines, this investigation expected to decide how a lot of impact academic writing capacity has on scholastic execution (Maher, 2011). There are various elements that add to one's prosperity or scarcity in that department at college level.

English, being a progressively broad worldwide language for business and advanced education, has drawn significant consideration for increasingly specific instructive procedure and strategies as Britain has grand advancement by fitting and structuring English for Academic Purposes (EAP) on present day lines, Journal of English for Academic. Improving English language capability, particularly, academic writing capacity at postgraduate level is the precondition to advance and expand inquire about work in the colleges of Pakistan. (Muhammad Sajid Jawaid Ahmed Siddiqui, 2015).

Recent studies emphasize that academic writing difficulty among EFL learners should not be viewed solely as a linguistic weakness, but as a multidimensional challenge involving discourse knowledge, institutional expectations, and cognitive processing demands (Lea & Street, 1998; Hyland, 2002; Kellogg, 2008). Understanding these interacting factors is essential for designing effective instructional interventions in higher education contexts.

Literature Review

Importance of Academic Writing

About all the examination contemplates led in different settings for example Europe, Africa, Gulf States, Australia and Asia in various circumstances, levels and techniques, pretty much, show practically comparative sort of etymological challenges experienced by EFL students at tertiary degree of instruction in both general English academic writing just as research writing. Since countless alumni and postgraduates in many colleges in Pakistan have a differentiated scholarly foundation, for example, with special case to world class tutoring framework, numerous open or tuition based schools and universities don't add to creating English language capability in understudies as envisioned. (Muhammad Sajid Jawaid Ahmed Siddiqui, 2015).

Studies consistently report that second-language academic writing requires learners to manage vocabulary knowledge, rhetorical awareness, and disciplinary conventions simultaneously, making it one of the most demanding skills in higher education (Bailey, 2018; Wingate, 2015).

Be that as it may, private schooling framework shows preferred execution over state funded training framework which is, much of the time, politically and authoritatively tormented with ills of defilement, theft of assets and bungle of commonplace expert for over three decades. Academic writing is widely recognized as a key ability for understudies to help their instructive execution at advanced education level. Be that as it may, in Europe the greater part of the examination concentrating on issues worried to help universal ESL students in their academic writing has been to a great extent connected with finding the approaches to help L2 understudies inside their scholarly establishments (Felix and Lawson, 1994)

Basics of Academic Writing

Hind Al Fadda (2012) point out that academic writing is required to address a scholarly network in which the understudies take part in dynamic learning. A few nuts and bolts or rules must be set up. Utilizing data to further one's potential benefit is a key piece of learning. Accomplishment at the postgraduate level relies upon the understudies' capacity to get to, assess, and orchestrate the words, thoughts, and assessments of others so as to build up their own scholarly voice. While displaying what they have realized, it is in this way essentially significant that understudies can show plainly what they have drawn from others and what is their own (Bristol Business School, 2006 as cited in Hind Al Fadda, 2012).

An understudy must speak the truth about how much possession he/she can guarantee over the thoughts framed, the appropriate responses found, and the suppositions communicated (Bristol Business School, 2006, p. 3). The understudy must keep certain standards to guarantee great academic writing, including accentuation rules. The writer put some basic role of writing as citied in Hind Al Fadda (2012) :

1. Punctuation The essential punctuation marks (excluding usage in reference systems) are the period, comma, semicolon, and colon. These include the following:

a. The period primarily marks the end of a sentence. A period is also used after an abbreviation where the final letter of the word is not the final word of the abbreviation, e.g., in enc. for enclosure, although Mr. for Mister is an exception (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
b. The comma is primarily used to separate parts of a sentence so that the meaning remains clearer for the reader. (I) A comma separates words in a list, e.g., He brought coal, kindling, matches, and turf. (II) A comma separates subordinate clauses within a complex sentence where two separate sentences are not required (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
c. The semicolon has two common uses. First, it may be used to separate items in a list after a colon. Second, it may be used to indicate a certain relationship between two parts of a sentence (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
d. The colon may be used to indicate the start of a list, as is similar to the above example for the semicolon. It may also be used before a quotation begins (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
e. Punctuation The basic accentuation marks (barring utilization in reference frameworks) are the period, comma, semicolon, and colon. These incorporate the accompanying:
f. The comma is principally used to isolate portions of a sentence with the goal that the significance remains more clear for the peruser. (I) A comma isolates words in a rundown, e.g., He brought coal, fuel, matches, and turf. (II) A comma isolates subordinate provisions inside a mind boggling sentence where two separate sentences are not required (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
g. The semicolon has two basic employments. In the first place, it might be utilized to isolate things in a rundown after a colon. Second, it might be utilized to show a specific connection between two pieces of a sentence (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
h. The colon might be utilized to show the beginning of a rundown, as is like the above model for the semicolon. It might likewise be utilized before a citation starts (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
i. The dash it is utilized to encase a gathering of words in a sentence where a rundown of things is isolated by commas. (Murphy, 2010, p. 9). • An oversight (where words are purposely forgotten about) is noted by the utilization of three periods (an ellipsis) trailed by a space. On the off chance that the exclusion happens toward the finish of a sentence, the ellipsis pursues the period.
j. Parentheses/sections are utilized to encase data of minor significance in a sentence. Sections are helpful if an essayist is confined to the utilization of commentaries (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).
k. Capital letters are utilized for names and titles, the main word in a sentence, and abbreviations, e.g., NQAI (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).
l. Quotations present data and thoughts that the understudy has accumulated from different sources. Scholastic genuineness necessitates that the understudy give documentation to show the wellsprings of the data and thoughts (Troyka and Hesse, 2006, p. 51).
m. Foreign words and expressions with well known shortened forms (especially Latin and French words) are as often as possible utilized when writing in different dialects. The show in academic writing is to utilize italics or shortenings for remote words or expressions and condensings (Murphy, 2010, p. 11).
n. Footnotes and endnotes are significant, alongside references and lists of sources, since they illuminate perusers regarding who said what, where, and when. At the point when the understudy gives this data, perusers believe their plans to be buttressed by the thoughts of specialists and are bound to take part in those thoughts (Fulwiler, 2002, p. 59).

Characteristics of Good Academic Writing

Yugianingrum (2010), p. 40–41 as citied in Hind Al Fadda (2012) identified four characteristics of good academic writing:

- Writing should play a significant role in the related community.
- The topic should be interesting for the writer, who believes that there is more to discover about it.
- The writer must care about the aesthetic quality of the text he/she writes.
- The community should help writers in accessing relevant resources and finding support and guidance.

Yugianingrum (2010) also recognized four qualities of good academic writing:

- Writing should assume a noteworthy job in the related network.
- The subject ought to be attractive for the author, who accepts that there is something else entirely to find about it.
- The essayist must think about the tasteful nature of the content he/she writes
- The people group should help journalists in getting to important assets and discovering backing and direction.

Challenges of Teaching Academic Writing to Postgraduate Students

Initially, write academically for the most part experiences an absence of association, which invigorates oral generation in discussion (Al Fadda, 2012). Regularly, in advanced education, academic writing expect understudies to draw on outside sources and receive the styles and classes of scholarly talk (Tardy, 2010).

Academic writing in a second language is widely recognized as one of the most demanding skills for university learners because it requires the integration of linguistic accuracy, disciplinary conventions, and critical thinking abilities. Research in second language writing highlights students must simultaneously manage grammar, rhetorical organization, and audience expectations when writing academic texts (Hyland, 2019; Bailey, 2018).

Research on self-efficacy suggests that individuals who possess strong confidence in their abilities tend to achieve higher levels of performance and personal well-being. Learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach difficult tasks as opportunities for mastery rather than as threats, which encourages deeper engagement and intrinsic motivation in their activities. In contrast, individuals who lack confidence in their capabilities often avoid challenging tasks, set lower goals, and demonstrate weaker commitment to their objectives. When encountering difficulties, they tend to focus on their limitations and possible negative outcomes instead of concentrating on effective strategies for success, which may result in reduced effort and a higher likelihood of giving up (Neh, 2019)

Self-efficacy is generally understood as an individual's belief in their capacity to accomplish specific goals. Within educational contexts, it can be viewed across several domains, including social self-efficacy, roommate self-efficacy, and academic self-efficacy. Social self-efficacy reflects students' ability to establish effective interpersonal relationships with peers and institutional staff, while roommate self-efficacy relates to managing interactions with individuals sharing the same living environment. Positive interpersonal relations in these domains support students' adjustment and overall academic functioning (Neh, 2019).

Second, educators constantly whine about the absence of information and certain abilities vital for academic writing among non-local speakers of English. A portion of these abilities include plotting, rewording, and abridging (Al-Shabanah, 2005 and Maher, 2011).

Third, academic writing regularly expects understudies to write from a specialist position, in any event, when they don't see themselves as specialists on their subjects (Tardy, 2010). Psychological factors also play a central role in writing development. Writing anxiety has been shown to reduce students' willingness to engage in complex academic writing tasks and negatively affect performance (Zhang, 2018). Similarly, learners with low academic self-efficacy tend to avoid revision processes and demonstrate weaker persistence when facing writing challenges (Raoofi et al., 2017; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Writing anxiety frequently leads students to delay writing tasks, minimize revision,

and prefer simpler sentence structures, ultimately restricting the development of advanced academic writing skills (Zhang, 2018).

Papers and related written work give chances to understudies to show probably the most requesting learning results; be that as it may, understudies are frequently progressively befuddled about what establishes a decent exposition than they are about the criteria for different sorts of assignments (Elander et al., 2006).

The instructors battled in their job of helping global understudies with academic writing. While they all recognized that it was imperative to offer understudies help with the type of criteria sheets, they additionally arraigned that they thought that it was trying to offer guidance to understudies on academic writing, and viewed themselves as being hazy about what that counsel ought to be (Arkoudis and Tran. 2010. p:175).

Moreover, poor language capability stays an issue. Tenderfoot essayists have especially poor language capability, and, because of this factor, can't lead viable talks in the objective language. Warschauer contends that oral language capability is significant for any student of language, since it is the most broadly utilized aptitude (Shafie et al., 2010, p. 63). Instructors, at that point, have a significant job in helping understudies build up their familiarity with the impacts of self-referencing, and empowering them to perceive both the decisions accessible to them and the effect of those decisions. With this comprehension, our students will be better ready to oversee their writing and address the extensive difficulties of scholarly writing in a subsequent language (Hyland, 2002, 357).

Writing problems

Not being equipped for academic writing might be a consequence of the unpredictable idea of the write expertise (Al Mukhdad, 2019). EFL learners especially from minor etnicity as an example is Bedouin people. They experience numerous issues utilizing the English language to impart orally or in writing structures (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2003).

Along these lines, it is vital for instructors, Feedback from teachers plays a crucial role in developing students' writing skills. As noted by Isaacson (1996, cited in Al Mukhdad, 2019), thoughtful feedback helps strengthen newly acquired abilities while addressing repeated mistakes. Likewise, Al Badi (2015) argues that learners require active teacher support, such as guidance on avoiding plagiarism when conducting library research. She also emphasizes that teachers should diagnose students' needs by identifying their writing problems through assessment. In addition, students must be given ample chances to practice writing regularly, since consistent practice helps them overcome difficulties. Mastery of the writing process — including idea generation, planning, drafting, and revising — is also essential. Teachers should supervise these stages and provide feedback so that students gradually gain competence and develop independent learning skills (Barkaoui, 2007). Al-Khasawneh in his investigation (2010) satiates various issues that frustrate the improvement of understudies' writing aptitudes. He finds that "a sensible jargon size is required for understudies to work successfully in their projects." And this goes in concordance with Abdulkareem's discoveries in 2013 that understudies from Syria respected utilizing jargon and sentence structure as notorious hindrances confronting them in academic writing. Another trouble is identified with language structure as Al-Khasawneh portrays it to be "critical in passing on precise messages."

Along these lines, poor language capability is a genuine point to consider (Al Fadda, 2012). Research on lexical competence indicates that academic success in university writing is strongly linked not simply to vocabulary size, but to learners' ability to use words precisely within academic contexts and disciplinary meanings (Nation, 2022). Therefore, it very well may be derived that issues recorded as a hard copy scholastically are because of etymological insufficiency, notwithstanding understudies' mentality towards academic writing since they just approach it with "negativities and misinterpretations" (Pineteh, 2014).

Along these lines, morphology, vocabulary, and sentence structure all should be learned so as to deliver great writing. In this sense, full capability comes about because of acing these skills (Barkaoui, 2007). Challenges go past the etymological components of the language to arrive at certain issues identified with the library inquire about; in any case, they don't go in segregation from the psychological part. For instance, rewording can be a source causing troubles recorded as a hard copy since

understudies peruse and afterward write in their own particular manner relying upon their comprehension. Subsequently, punctuation errors can be a normal outcome (Al Badi, 2015).

In her examination, Al Badi (2015) explores the potential factors that may bring about poor academic writing by understudies who do library inquire about activities. She concludes that summarizing, referencing, and references were accounted for to be the least tricky which is in opposition to Abdulkareem (2013) who guarantees that understudies have issues in rewording as their language isn't capable enough for such a procedure.

Solutions to the writing problems

Academic writing proficiency develops when students understand not only language rules but also the social and disciplinary conventions that shape scholarly communication, including argument structure, citation practices, and audience expectations (Hyland, 2019). Numerous understudies have built up an aptitude of covering their shortcoming recorded as a hard copy until they are compelled to show their abilities and therefore where the lacks happen. Instructors' job is basic as Isaacson (1996) states, "Giving cautious input will fortify recently learned aptitudes and right repeating issues". Correspondingly, Al Badi (2015) accepts that understudies need instructors' help.

Educators can prepare understudies, for example, to dodge unoriginality while taking a shot at their library investigated. She likewise focuses on the significance of thinking about understudies' needs through distinguishing their issues in a sort of a test. Understudies ought to have adequate chances to work on writing consistently. As it were, they can defeat challenges by rehearsing. Understudies should know the procedures of writing (producing thoughts, arranging, drafting, and reexamining) and educators need to screen them with criticism so understudies can ace those methods and have learning independence (Barkaoui, 2007).

Effective writing instruction therefore requires structured pedagogical approaches rather than simple grammar correction. Evidence indicates that explicit teaching of writing strategies, revision cycles, and scaffolded writing tasks significantly improves student outcomes in academic writing contexts (Graham, 2019). The stream and flow study adds to the exploration as far as offering important experiences into the most troublesome parts of academic writing looked by understudies at AIU. It features the key troubles from understudies' perspective. Also, it finishes up with proposing a few answers for this issue.

Research Method

This journal was written and developed from Library research. This is conducted three main steps used to gather the information and to complete this journal. First, relevant literature on academic writing, second language learning, and writing pedagogy was systematically identified and reviewed. During this step, the researcher organized key concepts and relationships among themes using a visual conceptual mapping technique to clarify the structure of the discussion. Second, the collected sources were analyzed to identify the underlying theoretical background, key characteristics, and major findings related to academic writing development and challenges in EFL contexts.

The third is the step of developing and expressing ideas regarding the fusion and the methodology formulated from the fusion. To commit these steps tree steps the writers used two sources that were i.e. primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to original works in the form of research reports conducted by researchers, psychologist, linguists, language teachers, as well as language practitioners which represent original thinking, reports on their discussion and finding. On the other hand, secondary sources refer to information written by language experts such as books, online articles, dictionaries, handbooks, as well as reviews. The writers use both of them as references.

Finding and Discussion

Based on what writer put in above material, it is important to write academically specially in undergraduate student. In the other hand, the reality in the field nowadays many of learners in institution rarely write academically. The aim of this research is to know the problems regarding in learning academically to EFL. Higher education system, it especially at postgraduate level, is concerned more with empirical studies than is intended to teach and develop fundamentals of English language.

Feedback in academic writing classrooms does not automatically improve student performance; learners must first understand how to interpret and apply comments, which requires both linguistic competence and awareness of academic writing standards (Han & Hyland, 2019). However, most of universities particularly public universities face the existing challenge of lack of research writing skills. The problem that detain students here are limited vocabulary:

- They are difficult to arrange the coherent of sentences,
- It relating to the memory,
- Poor motivation,
- Their writings often lack the flair and sophistication which emerge from conceptual, reflective and analytical thinking.

The findings of this study indicate that undergraduate EFL learners experience academic writing difficulty not merely because of limited linguistic knowledge, but because academic writing demands the simultaneous control of language, cognition, and identity construction. Academic writing is therefore not simply a technical skill; it is a complex intellectual practice that requires students to position themselves as knowledge producers rather than passive learners (Hyland, 2002; Tardy, 2010).

Writing anxiety and low academic self-confidence have been identified as major predictors of weak academic writing performance among university EFL students (Zhang, 2018; Raoofi et al., 2017). One of the most visible problems is limited academic vocabulary, which restricts students' ability to express complex reasoning. Without sufficient lexical resources, learners tend to produce repetitive sentences, avoid argumentative structures, and rely on simple constructions. Previous research confirms that vocabulary depth strongly predicts academic writing performance among EFL students (Nation, 2013).

However, linguistic limitations alone do not explain the full problem. Many students struggle to organize coherent arguments, even when their grammar is acceptable. This suggests that the challenge lies partly in discourse-level competence. Academic writing requires the ability to construct logical progression, maintain thematic unity, and guide the reader through structured reasoning. For learners educated in systems emphasizing memorization rather than analytical writing, this transition creates what may be described as an "academic discourse shock."

This phenomenon is particularly visible in Indonesian higher education contexts, where students often enter university with strong theoretical knowledge but limited experience in critical writing. They may understand course content but lack training in transforming knowledge into structured academic argumentation. As Lea and Street (1998) argue, academic writing is deeply tied to institutional literacy practices rather than merely language proficiency. Another significant factor is cognitive load. Writing academically in a foreign language requires learners to simultaneously manage:

- idea generation
- language accuracy
- rhetorical structure
- citation conventions
- audience awareness

This multi-layered processing easily overwhelms working memory, especially for novice writers (Kellogg, 2008). Consequently, students often simplify ideas not because they lack intelligence, but because cognitive resources are exhausted by language management. Motivation also plays a crucial role. Many students approach academic writing with anxiety, low self-efficacy, and fear of negative evaluation. Writing becomes psychologically threatening rather than intellectually empowering. This multi-layered processing easily overwhelms working memory, especially for novice writers (Kellogg, 2008). Consequently, students often simplify ideas not because they lack intelligence, but because cognitive resources are exhausted by language management.

Motivation is another key factor in academic writing. Many students experience anxiety, low confidence, and fear of negative judgment, which makes writing feel psychologically intimidating instead of intellectually rewarding. According to self-efficacy theory, learners who doubt their writing ability tend to avoid challenging writing tasks, and this avoidance slows their progress (Bandura, 1997, cited in Neh, 2019). The theory further explains that individuals usually attempt activities they believe

they can successfully complete and avoid those they expect to fail. In contrast, people with strong self-efficacy are more likely to believe they can handle demanding tasks and therefore treat them as challenges to overcome rather than threats to escape (Bandura, 1994, cited in Neh, 2019).

Importantly, the findings show that academic writing difficulty is not a student "failure," but a predictable outcome of systemic educational transitions. When learners move from knowledge-consumption classrooms into research-oriented universities, they are suddenly expected to perform advanced discourse practices without gradual scaffolding. Therefore, the role of instructors becomes essential not as correctors of grammar alone, but as facilitators of academic identity formation. Effective teaching should include:

- explicit modeling of academic reasoning
- guided practice in paraphrasing and synthesis
- structured feedback cycles
- opportunities for low-stakes writing

Research consistently demonstrates that formative feedback and process-based writing instruction significantly improve EFL academic writing outcomes (Ferris, 2014; Graham & Perin, 2007). Ultimately, academic writing development should be understood as a long-term socialization process into disciplinary thinking, not a short-term language exercise.

Especially in analytical thinking that mostly of student find it is hard to do that. In Indonesia usually use cognitive or knowledge in various and almost over the major they faced in the class, so when they go to university level they get culture shock. Just as writer said before, different background of knowledge also impact the way they are thinking and put it in writing. Not every learner can increase the access to higher education. They have to find the way to deal with that obstacle. Explicit instruction in writing strategies, combined with structured practice and guided revision, has been shown to significantly improve students' ability to construct coherent academic arguments and sustain logical text development (Graham, 2019; Bailey, 2018). Here, the role of instructor is significant to the learner based on what writer put above. Instructors can prepare understudies, for example, to dodge unoriginality while taking a shot at their library investigated by using paraphrase and quotation stage. They can also teach the classroom.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Students encounter multiple barriers when developing academic writing proficiency, such as limited conceptual understanding, insufficient background knowledge, problems constructing coherent texts, and weak analytical skills. Overcoming these challenges requires a shared commitment between lecturers and learners. Lecturers must provide structured guidance, constructive feedback, and innovative teaching approaches, while students need to actively engage in the writing process, build confidence, and persist in overcoming linguistic and cognitive challenges. The development of academic writing skills among EFL learners depends on a collaborative effort in which teachers provide structured pedagogical support and students actively cultivate confidence, autonomy, and sustained practice to overcome academic writing challenges.

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