

A panoramic view of a structured how to write for publication course: College students' views and tips

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Abstract

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Despite the privileged status of writing in academia, satisfying outputs are still low, and thus lack of knowledge about the nature of academic writing and publishing is attempted to be compensated in how to write for publication courses. Responding to the existing calls to conduct writing-related studies going far beyond diagnosing well-established writing challenges, the current case study seeks to probe 8 MA candidates' experiences, needs, wishes, and suggestions in a structured how-to-write for publication course through open-ended questionnaires and student diaries at the MA Applied Linguistics program of a large-size state university in Türkiye. The qualitative data of the current study were triangulated with an open-ended questionnaire in the form of participant self-reports and student diaries. The findings show that such writing interventions were valued for adding up to graduate candidates and socializing their writing. However, MA candidates needed to be supported with negotiated workshops as such extensions could help them apply writing theory and find audience. The insights are provided, and the findings are discussed to suggest implications for both research and educational policy.

Keywords: academia; academic writing; article; graduates; publishing; MA

INTRODUCTION

Writing for publication “enjoys a privileged status” ([Hyland, 2013, p. 60](#)) for both students and particularly academics who are supposed to “publish”; otherwise, they are bound to “perish” ([McGrail et al., 2006, p. 19](#)). With [Hartley’s \(2008\)](#) own words, “their livelihood depends upon it” (p. 14). A good publication record is prioritized as it shows individual and institutional academic performance, ensures external funding from government or other parties, helps academics disseminate knowledge, enables them to get an academic promotion, offers financial gains, helps academics build up a reputation, satisfies curiosity, and meets the need to understand the researched topic ([Hyland, 2013; McGrail et al., 2006](#)). English as a foreign language context is not an exception, as students desiring to pursue an academic career are marginalized if they cannot produce well-organized academic texts in English in both undergraduate and graduate programs ([Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Naghdipour, 2016](#)). As in [Hyland’s \(2013\)](#) own words, “we are ultimately defined and judged by our writing”.

The need to publish in English as the language of science is documented to worsen that situation, i.e., the pressure to publish to survive in academia. Academics are expected to publish frequently and produce their written outcomes in English as the global language to disseminate knowledge rather than their mother tongue ([Hyland, 2013](#)) to be visible to a large extent ([Gastel & Day, 2016](#)). This, however, as [Hyland \(2013\)](#) rightly notes, poses a danger, for there is the risk to “exclude many L2 writers from the web of global scholarship, so depriving the world of knowledge developed outside the Anglophone centers of research” (p. 68). The existing literature covers several investigations showing how academic writing in English creates serious challenges for L2 writers, including new graduate students who are supposed to follow certain academic conventions and expertise in both academic and specific genres ([Hanauer et al., 2019; Kunkel, 2024; Subandowo & Utomo, 2023](#)).

Higher education institutions have been documented to offer classes to teach the basics of academic writing and publishing so that they can help the related parties to survive in academia. [McGrail et al. \(2006\)](#) summarize three kinds of effective intervention to encourage academics to publish actively: writing support groups, writing courses, and provision of a writing coach or mentor. In the first one, the cheapest and most frequent intervention, peers meet regularly to discuss their manuscripts to improve them and support each other psychologically. The related studies on this intervention have shown that this collaboration ends in higher publication rates (see, for instance, [Wilmot, 2016](#)). In writing courses, on the other hand, experts offer information about article writing and the publication process. Also referred to explicit writing instruction (EWI), it requires teaching writing strategies and offering and analysis models ([Falardeau et al., 2024](#)). Such courses are documented to enhance writing proficiency, text quality, and self-efficacy ([Falardeau et al., 2024; Finlayson & McCrudden, 2020; Subandowo & Utomo, 2023](#)); however, they generally do not bring about immediate scholarly outcomes like the former. The last intervention, the least frequent one, should be understood as the support of a writing coach or formal mentor during the writing and publication process.

Regarding the academic and educational landscape of Türkiye, it could be noted there is a significant demand for enrolment in undergraduate and graduate programs ([Kurul-Tural, 2007](#)). Although Turkish universities serving for mainly teaching, researching, and contributing to society have been impacted by global and local developments such as the country’s desire to harmonize with the European Union, the education system is still criticized for its authoritarian nature, placing heavy emphasis on rote memorization and exams rather than encouraging questioning, critical thinking, promoting the development of

an autonomous identity, and encouraging active and free learning inside and outside the classroom ([Akyol & Arslan, 2014](#)).

To complicate the matter even further, the Turkish academic culture does not emphasize teaching and practicing writing, whether in Turkish or English. In other words, as noted by [Altınmakas and Bayyurt \(2019\)](#), writing is limited in Türkiye for lack of English writing experience before tertiary education. Besides, the Turkish writing experience is inadequate in that Turkish students are generally asked to write short paragraphs and essays to answer the questions related to the Turkish reading texts in their coursebooks, summaries for the books they read, and creative short stories. Additionally, they are asked to write about usual topics such as holidays, experiences, Atatürk as the founder and first president of the Republic of Türkiye, and his principles, technology, and so forth rather than discuss critical issues. What complicates the situation further is that Turkish students do not have writing experience in English, too. They do not have writing instruction as teachers try to improve their grammar, vocabulary, and reading. This is because in the English Language Proficiency Test, to be admitted to English teacher education, English language and literature, or translation programs, English-majoring high school students are supposed to answer 80 multiple-choice questions focusing on reading, vocabulary, and grammar ([Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019](#)). Therefore, they come to university without English writing practice and knowledge, thereby feeling high writing anxiety and having low self-confidence. ([Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019](#); [Kırmızı & Dagdeviren-Kırmızı, 2015](#)). Those limitations naturally affect the profile of graduate candidates and graduate writing, which “alarming and worrisome in relation to quality and ethics of academic writing” ([Toprak & Yucel, 2020, n.p. 12](#)). Therefore, the issue is vital, and further studies investigating student writing experiences at both undergraduate and graduate levels is vital.

Besides, although writing for publication is regarded as one of the most essential skills in academia, academics are only generally offered professional and formal education about how-to-write and publish neither during their studentship and working at university. Rather, they are expected to improve this skill on the job ([McGrail et al., 2006](#)). This situation also applies to Türkiye, where graduate candidates not offered satisfying, well-structured academic writing help have to turn to self-help through searching for help in books, manuals, and so forth, as noted by [Toprak and Yucel \(2020\)](#). Responding to this need, I aimed at offering a structured how-to-write for publication course for 1st-grade MA students and searching their experiences. As a pracademic (both an academician and teaching staff), I did not want the current qualitative investigation to remain at a diagnostic level in that I aimed at uncovering the underlying reasons for those experiences, needs, wishes, and suggestions, for I was motivated to offer pedagogical implications for both graduate programs and MA candidates to help them reach their scholarly publication targets. Exploring writing practices and experiences could help related parties make informed decisions about MA curriculum and instructional decisions. Such small-scale investigations of various academic writing interventions could give ideas to related parties, including those in Türkiye, to make informed decisions to ensure satisfying writing outcomes. This is urgently needed for Türkiye, for “Turkish academic writing at the graduate level is like an epidemic and contagious disease” ([Toprak & Yucel, 2020, n.p.](#)) due to a lack of quality and originality. To these ends, to go further than diagnosis and description, I designed the following research questions that would guide me in my exploration of my students’ academic writing journey:

1. What are the participants’ perceptions of academic writing in English?
2. What are their academic writing experiences?
3. What are their needs for academic writing in English?
4. What are their suggestions for successful English academic writing experiences?

METHODOLOGY

I conducted the current study with a total population of 8 graduate students attending the Applied Linguistics MA programme of a large public university in the northeast part of Türkiye. A total of 11 students enrolled in the class; however, two female and one male student dropped the classes after a few weeks due to their family responsibilities and health problems. As the research design is a case study, which often requires gathering data from the nearest participants, I chose the nearest individuals with whom I had no access problems, i.e., my graduate students taking my course. Besides, this sampling strategy saved time and money to me (Cohen et al., 2007; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, my aim was to uncover my students' perceptions, experiences, needs, and suggestions and explain the underlying reasons rather than to generalize beyond my sample. As I was aware of the disadvantages of non-probability sampling, I provided detailed information about my participants to let the audience understand the findings and see how they apply to their contexts (Fraenkel & Walllen, 2009). Detailed information about the participants could be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Information about the Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital status	Hometown	Degree earned in BA	Current job	Job experience
Ayse	F	23	Single	Trabzon	ELL	Student	0
Canan	F	25	Single	Trabzon	T&I	Research assistant	0-1 year
Meryem	F	23	Single	Giresun	ELT	English teacher	1 year
Seher	F	23	Single	Trabzon	ELL	Student	0
Batuhan	M	27	Single	Erzincan	ELT	English teacher	4 years
Enes	M	36	Married	Gümüşhane	ELT	English teacher	9 years
Kenan	M	24	Single	Giresun	ELL	English teacher	2 months
Mithat	M	31	Married	Bursa	ELT	Instructor	8 years

*ELL: *English Language and Literature*; T&I: *Translation and Interpreting*; ELT: *English Language Teaching*

As I was aware of the potential bias and wanted to ensure data authenticity, I adopted a transparent attitude. I informed the participants about my dual role at the outset, emphasizing role separation. I ensured that in the course, I was their instructor, whose ultimate aim was to realize her course objectives. Informing them about the research aspect, I ensured that their answers would not affect their standing in the course and their honest ideas were valuable. I encouraged them to keep diaries yet clarified the option not to keep one. As they were aware of the challenging nature of research, and I managed to establish a rapport, they were internally motivated to help me by keeping regular diaries. I also ensured confidentiality and anonymity, adding that their ideas would not affect their grades. To minimize the potential for bias, I also asked them to hand in their diaries after I gave their course grade in the system.

The current study was conducted in IDE 5100 Academic Writing in English, which is a mandatory course in the first grade of the MA program. In this course, I help MA first-year students of social sciences to prepare scholarly journal manuscripts that could be published

and understood by interested readers and offer them practical advice for a high probability of being accepted for publication. In the current study, we had 14 face-to-face classroom sessions on the following issues: (1) Some Preliminaries: Understanding Feelings about Writing; The Nature of Academic Writing; The Business of Academic Writing, (2) Publishing Articles in Academic Journals; What is a Scientific Paper? An Overview of its Sections, (3) How to Prepare the Title and Abstract/Structured Abstract for a Manuscript, (4) How to Prepare an Introduction for a Manuscript, (5) How to Write Literature Review; Plagiarism, (6) How to Write Methodology, (7) How to Write Results, Discussion and, Conclusion and References, (8) How to Prepare Effective Tables and Figures, (9) Workshop for Evaluating a Candidate Article, (10) Workshop for Evaluating a Candidate Article, (11, 12, 13, and 14) Student Presentations on Their Literature Review. In the first term, these first-graders did not have active research experience; rather, they had passive research experience, and their awareness of conducting and reporting scholarly research increased (Healey et al., 2010). However, in the second term, they would be involved in active research. Therefore, the syllabus of the second term was planned to cover issues such as How to Submit the Manuscript: Submission to Print, How to Deal with Editors: Responding to Reviewers' Feedback, Doing Other Writing for Publication: Review Paper, Opinion, Book Chapter and Book, Oral Paper presentation, Poster, Conference Report, Thesis (Focus on Conference Presentation), and so on. The current study was conducted in the first term, though.

To answer the research questions, I designed a case study, which should be understood as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p. 50). I examined the perceptions, experiences, needs, and suggestions of my students (a single case) in a detailed manner from the perspectives of my graduate students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007) rather than “the exploratory stage of some other type of research method” (Yin, 2018, p. 49). To gather the qualitative data, I utilized an English self-devised open-ended questionnaire in the form of participant self-reports and student diary. I used the questionnaire as an interview schedule as the participants come from different cities of the country for just one busy day at the institution, and they openly expressed their wish to respond to the questionnaire at the same time by writing in my presence in the last class. My presence also helped me to clarify possible ambiguous parts of these self-administered questionnaires (Bryman, 2004; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Moreover, these self-completion questionnaires were cheaper, quicker, and easier for me to conduct. I eliminated the interviewer effect and they were convenient for my participants who had several academic, professional, and family responsibilities (Bryman, 2004). Besides, I distributed small diaries to my students at the very beginning of the term and asked them to write English entries after each classroom meeting. I gave them guiding questions, although I ensured that they were not limited to these items. Student diary, which is commonly used in qualitative research, could be helpful in understanding the relationship between the students and the experience, their identity, the challenges of the process, and their coping strategies (Ersoy, 2015).

Aware of the inherently reflective and personal nature of those two data-gathering instruments, I designed the prompts for the questionnaires and diary carefully by creating focused and definitive questions inspired by the literature. I believed this could guide them to reflect on it in a structured and relevant way. As an additional measure to minimize subjectivity, I attempted to document the research and analysis procedure that could help me avoid personal biases. To ensure validity, at the outset, I also utilized peer review of my research methodology and data-gathering instruments, as well as asked for the interpretations and feedback of one of my colleagues with a PhD degree in my field.

Besides, throughout the study, I engaged in regular reflexive practice by regularly reminding myself of my dual role positionality as the course instructor and as a researcher

examining the experiences of my students. I am aware that my dual role could affect how participants view the study, they respond, and how I interpret their responses. I consciously tried to put my personal views, beliefs, and expectations aside while analysing their diaries and questionnaires. Besides, at the outset, I highlighted the importance of honest ideas. I openly informed them about how such small-scale attempts could contribute to my professional development and serve as letters to successors. Besides, ensured that their honest ideas would not affect their grades.

To analyze the qualitative data gathered via self-administered open-ended questionnaires and student diaries, I used content analysis, which should be understood as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” ([Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278](#)). As [Berg \(2004\)](#) rightly notes, this method is “a passport to listening to the words of the text and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words” (p. 269). I believed that it could enable me to understand the inner world of my students in their academic writing journey for publication. Before starting the analysis, I first checked all the questionnaires and diaries separately to determine whether the answers were complete and accurate. After this data preparation stage, I tried to familiarise myself with the data from two sources by carrying out multiple readings of the reports. After this initial review, I reread them to note down recurring ideas, i.e., codes. Due to the small size of the sampling, I manually highlighted and coded the text parts. My four research questions guided me in identifying the relevant themes, i.e., perceptions, experiences, needs, and suggestions, and grouping the related codes. For the sake of the flavor of the original data, I tried to choose representative quotations from both questionnaires and diaries ([Creswell, 2007](#); [Miles & Huberman, 1994](#)).

I ensured the trustworthiness of my data by following some steps. First, to avoid possible wording problems, I asked for the opinion of one of my colleagues, who holds a PhD degree in Applied Linguistics. Second, I gathered the data using two instruments, i.e., a questionnaire and student diary, to triangulate the findings. Also, I ensured honesty in my answers by being open to the participants, clarifying the aim of the research, showing how it could ensure my continuous professional development, and offering to share the results with them. As the course increased their awareness of the nature, value, and difficulties of academia and publishing, they were motivated to help me with their honest answers. Furthermore, my transparency was assumed to encourage them to be honest with their answers. Besides, for the transferability of my findings and the possibility to encourage future researchers to replicate my study, I provided detailed information about the setting and participants, research design, the procedure, and data gathering and analysis ([Booth & Booth, 1994](#); [Cohen et al., 2007](#)).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I analyzed the data under four major themes in line with the research questions: (1) Perceptions, (2) Experiences, (3) Needs, and (4) Suggestions. Besides, I identified several subthemes, which are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Major and Sub-themes

Major Themes	Minor Themes
Perceptions	understanding of academic writing feelings towards academic writing characterization of good and bad academic texts ideas about the standard IMRAD/ILMRD academic journal format the easiest and most difficult part of a scholarly journal article academic writer identity
Experiences	challenges they face in the process coping strategies they employed to manage these challenges literature review writing experiences
Needs	-
Suggestions	suggestions for being accepted by academic journals suggestions for turning into a good academic writer

The participants generally associated academic writing with certain conventions, types of discourse, and genres that come in different shapes and sizes. In one participant's own words, it is "quite standard and away from creativity" (Mithat). They commonly touched on its formal style that requires patience and experience. Although they generally associated it with student assignments, two emphasized the link between academic writing and conducting research and scholarly publishing. Surprisingly, one participant stated that in theory, academic writing is supposed to be clear and concise, yet in reality, they come across complex texts covering long sentences and unknown words. The following participant excerpt can best show the general understanding of academic writing:

To me, academic writing in English generally means academic writing styles such as articles and theses as we see and use what we learn in academic writing classes at university. I visualise long and complex sentences and unknown words, although they are supposed to be concise and clear. We commonly see such sentences in these writings. I also associate academic writing with conducting academic research and publishing scholarly texts. [Seher, mistakes in original]

The participants answer clearly show that they regarded academic writing as "the major marker of productivity in academia" (Belcher, 2009, p. 2), yet they were aware of how the business of writing is a demanding area with all its conventions. The statements about their understanding showed that they were aware of the fact that academic products have certain parts; they must follow certain academic writing conventions and pay attention to content, organization, and clarity (Gastel & Day, 2016; Hartley, 2008; Norris, 2016).

Almost all highlighted the importance of academic writing as it allows them to be known in academia all around the world and serves as a key for high-quality academic products. However, most still stated that it is not "a piece of cake" and requires following a challenging, tiring, and tedious process due to academic writing conventions, types of discourse, and formal writing tone. This requires patience and commitment, and sometimes, the process may lower their self-confidence. Yet, three participants stated that in time, the more they devoted time to it, the better they became, and their self-confidence automatically

increased, and they felt more comfortable, happier, and more hopeful. For example, Ayşe expresses her concerns and the role of a good start as follows:

I still feel bored while trying to write something. I cannot help thinking why I need to write everything clearly, as if I were talking to a kid, although I have complex ideas. However, after I believe that after we start writing, we could feel more encouraged and have good products. The most difficult part is to start. After starting and allocating enough time for it, it fulfils my soul. [Ayşe]

However, there was a total agreement on the fact that although academic writing is challenging and sometimes discouraging, it is a must skill for them to develop as “their livelihood depends upon it” ([Hartley, 2008, p. 14](#)), i.e., to pursue an academic career. In other words, like [Hyland \(2013\)](#) notes, they were aware of its power to define and judge graduate candidates.

A good academic text was associated with several positive adjectives: “direct, relevant, clear, not plagiarised, backed up by evidence, covering certain parts with their moves, not tiring, well-organised, simple, comprehensible, not repetitive, reader friendly, proven, and fluent.” Comprehensibility and good organisation were highlighted frequently by the participants, as is found in the following excerpt:

It should cover sub-parts and their required moves, as highlighted in the classes. As a good academic text is formed based on certain conventions, it does not leave the reader in dark/dilemma and clearly expresses what it aims to do. It should not cover any ambiguousness so that it could encourage the reader to go on reading. A good text clearly expresses its message and does not tire the reader.” [Batuhan]

On the other hand, in the characterisation of a bad academic text, the participants used various negative adjectives such as “plagiarised, unnecessarily long, unclear, excursive, complex, not organized, repetitive, covering no justifications, not fluent, covering unknown words, not reader-friendly, and allowing different interpretations.” Particularly reader friendliness was highlighted in that “long and complex sentences could complicate the text for the reader and discourages him/her to go on reading” [Seher] and “texts should take the reader into consideration as every written product is created to be read” [Kenan]. In line with what important figures have focused in the related literature, content, organisation, and clarity were highlighted in the characterisation of a good academic writing (see, for instance, [Gastel & Day, 2016](#); [Hartley, 2008](#); [Norris, 2016](#)).

All the participants frequently touched on the importance of following a specific organization in academic writing. They justified their positions as such standards are of utmost importance to ensure high-quality academic products, avoid academic chaos, let both university professors and journal reviewers evaluate and review written products objectively, make texts reader-friendly and save them time, guide both the writer and reader, and ease writing the writing process. The following participant clearly expresses how following such standard formats makes it easy for both parties, i.e., writers and readers: “Academic texts with certain standard format makes the writing process easy as it guides the writer. For the reader, such formats help the reader to follow the content” [Mithat].

Surprisingly, the participants commented more on the most challenging part rather than the easiest one. Five of them stated that it was quite challenging to write the review of literature. This is because the writer is supposed to find the relevant sources that cover the

issue from both positive and negative aspects, read a vast body of existing literature, evaluate, synthesize the existing works and reach a conclusion, and cite what does not belong to them without plagiarising. The other three found methodology, findings, and discussion and introduction challenging to write as the methodology is the backbone of the text that needs to justify what has been done and why; the findings and discussion part requires a careful data analysis and interpretation, and it could be difficult to start writing, respectively. Only four commented on the easiest part, listing the conclusion, literature review, and findings and discussion. The following excerpt can best show the general tendency in this question:

Among these parts, the easiest part to write for me is the conclusion, as here we have stated everything until then, and now we are only supposed to write a short and concise summary covering the most critical findings and importance of our study. That is to say, you have completed everything, and everything fits together. The only thing to do is to take a photo. However, the most difficult part is review of literature as you are supposed to find relevant sources among thousands of articles. Of course, you should find those that support and argue against your thesis. You are supposed to read them all, internalize them, and create a synthesis. To sum up, it is a challenging task (a sad face emoji).” [Enes]

Out of eight participants, six were found to have developed a positive writer identity. Five described themselves as a “novice academic writer” who has a very long way to go and takes slow yet firm steps forward. They almost commonly believed that this academic writing journey and the learning process would never end:

After each written product of mine, I see myself as a learning writer and I am sure that this will go on like that. I never think that I will reach an end point, and even I think that there is not such an end point in academic writing. Language is a living entity and while writing we use that entity. Therefore, I hope that I will learn more every single day.” [Kenan]

Only one saw himself as a “first researcher and then academic writer,” as he stated that the more he improved his researching skills, the more encouraged he would feel to create high-quality written products. On the other hand, two were negative about themselves in that they described themselves as writers who procrastinate and does not write regularly. Still, they talked about the potential they had in that if they tried harder, read and write regularly, and behave a little bit more attentively, they could have high quality written products.

In addition to these questions regarding the participants’ understanding of scholarly writing, they were asked to comment on their experiences in this how-to-write for publication course. Although the participants had passive research experience, their awareness of conducting and reporting scholarly research increased in the course. They only practiced how-to-write a literature review as they were supposed to hand in their reviews on a self-chosen topic, and present orally the content and talk about the process as a final assignment. I identified several challenges in the process: need for more time to internalize the theory of academic writing and see how the rules are applied in accurate articles, difficulty in understanding some parts of a scholarly research article as they require more moves, the difficulty to access relevant sources to write their review, the need to read much to write a high-quality review in a short time as a final work, short quizzes on the content of weekly readings, overloaded course syllabus, sadness as the lecturer shared personal reason for student absence with the classmates, a tiring and long journey to come to the classes from a different city, challenging tasks and assignments in other classes, family responsibilities,

anxiety to avoid plagiarism, difficulty in wise time management, boredom, procrastination, heavy teaching responsibilities, and lack of chance to analyze more example articles to see how writing theory is applied there. To illustrate, the following excerpts cover some of these challenges:

As the course was overloaded, I could not get used to its fast tempo. Everything explained was clear. I could not defeat the lazy and coward writer in my mind. I wish I could perform more voluminously. [Ayşe]

I had difficulty in writing my review of literature as we had limited time and many more things to do. I wish I should have read more sources and write a far better literature review as my final assignment. [Kenan]

The most challenging thing for me to write a review as a final assignment; however, that solely resulted from me as I could not manage my time wisely. Otherwise, I do not have any lack of knowledge or unclear issues. [Seher]

Some of these excuses align with the long list of academic writing obstacles that [Belcher \(2009\)](#) lists. Particularly, having a busy schedule, having responsibility to prepare for teaching, procrastination, i.e., promising to start writing after doing important tasks, feeling depressed, feeling the need to read more before writing, having difficulty to start writing, having childcare responsibilities, feeling guilty about not writing, writing too slowly, spending imbalanced hours on writing every day, lacking required resources to write, and having difficulty in writing in English seem to serve as serious obstacles for the participants. The results of the current study are also in line with what has been found in research studies conducted in different educational contexts: lack of self-confidence ([Morton et al., 2015](#)), lack of pre-university writing instruction in English, inadequate writing skills, restrictions of academic writing conventions to produce ideas ([Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019](#)), problems with integrating reading content into writing, i.e., paraphrasing and summarising ([Hirvela & Du, 2013](#)), difficulty in constructing an outline and organizing the text ([Green, 2013](#)), time limitation, poor vocabulary and grammar knowledge ([Atay & Kurt, 2006](#)), time pressure and lack of writing experience ([Kırmızı & Dagdeviren-Kırmızı, 2015](#)), writing course designed without a needs analysis that negotiates learners' realistic wants, difficulty to start putting ideas on paper ([Becker, 2007](#)), procrastination and writer's block ([Hartley, 2008](#)).

Although I identified diverse challenges, I found the participants quite insufficient regarding employing various strategies to solve the problems they faced in the process. Based on the learning strategy of [Oxford \(1990\)](#), I categorized these few coping strategies as direct and indirect ones. The analysis shows that they employed four direct and three indirect strategies. The direct ones were about learning and compensating: researching more about the course topic from different sources on the Internet, reading much, analysing example articles to see how literature review is written, and revising course notes regularly. For example, in the following excerpt, the participant touches on the importance of analysing example articles to see how the theory of academic writing is applied in real articles:

To overcome the problems that I faced, I analysed published example reviews of literature. However, as the course duration was not enough and we could not practice much, only analysing these examples cannot work well. I need to reflect what I have learned on paper. I think that I am weak at that point. [Meryem]

The rest are indirect strategies, i.e., social and affective ones: asking for the professors' help to find relevant sources to write their review, motivating themselves, and focusing more on their academic tasks and responsibilities by limiting their social life activities. Time management problems and procrastination were highlighted by two participants, who confessed that they did not know any workable solution for these problems, thereby creating low quality products. However, they self-reported to have a good writing potential:

I have not found any solution about time management yet. As academic writing is boring for me and I need to spend longer hours on it, I have realized that I constantly procrastinate. However, unfortunately I do not know how to fix this problem. [Seher]

The aim of the course was to increase the participants' awareness of academic writing issues to have a higher chance of publishing in academia, thereby increasing their passive writing/research experience. The only active step was writing a high-quality literature review on a self-chosen topic as a final assignment. I investigated their active writing experience, too. The data analysis showed that the participants learned how to organize their reviews in that course, managed to find related sources, were more careful while utilizing others' ideas in their written product, and improved as they wrote more. However, their answers indicated that they had primarily negative experiences due to a lack of practice and time management skills. Time-related problems were the most frequently stated ones. Almost half of them stated that they had difficulty in managing their time well to read all related sources and integrate them into their product. Besides, they had heavy course requirements in other classes, they could not spend enough time on their review. They also said they needed more time to create a portfolio of related sources to read and integrate. Language-related problems were another challenge category. While one had difficulty in expressing what she meant, one could not paraphrase others' ideas successfully, one confessed to overuse quotations rather than express others' ideas by using their own words. Besides, one confessed that it was difficult for him to understand and interpret the content of articles. Other than these, one said that he sometimes felt bored and discouraged, and one reported how it was challenging to create a good outline that covers necessary issues. One also said that he could not access articles as they were paid. Some of these challenges can be found in the following excerpt:

The most challenging thing for me was that I did not have enough time. I found a lot of sources, yet I could not integrate them into my review, thus. I realized that I could not interpret the content of articles, and I had difficulty in deciding what to take from these articles. [Seher]

Interestingly, one participant stated that he misunderstood the exact nature of literature review at the very beginning as he thought that academics or students are supposed to read the related sources and summarise them in the literature review. However, the process taught him just the opposite:

I misinterpreted how to write this section of a scholarly journal article as I knew that this part covers a summary of the related studies. However, it is not so. I learned that it requires to analyze, synthesize, comment on the staff and show where we stand in the issue. I think we should have analysed more articles to cope with these challenges. [Batuhan]

Although active research experiences of my students were limited in the current study, the findings correspond to the results of several earlier studies that probe academic writing challenges such as lack of writing instruction and practice in English ([Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019](#); [Kırmızı & Dagdeviren-Kırmızı, 2015](#)), problems with integrating reading

content into writing, i.e., paraphrasing and summarising ([Hirvela & Du, 2013](#)), difficulty in constructing an outline and organizing the text ([Green, 2013](#)), lack of good time management skills, poor English proficiency ([Atay & Kurt, 2006](#)), time pressure ([Kırmızı & Dagdeviren-Kırmızı, 2015](#)), difficulty to start putting ideas on paper ([Becker, 2007](#)), procrastination and writer's block ([Hartley, 2008](#)), to list but a few.

The oft-stated academic writing need was that although they learned the nature of academic writing and the requirements of each part of a scholarly journal article, they wanted to practice academic writing more and take feedback. They all thought that although everything was safe and sound in theory, practice could make best. They also expressed their wish to learn how to use databases: "A workshop on how to use online university databases could be useful. Also, another class where we could practice each section of scholarly journal articles could help us add up to our writing experiences" [Mithat]. Besides, citing others' ideas in their own papers was stated as a challenging task, and thus they wanted to learn and practice how to paraphrase without plagiarizing. One also stated that he needed to read more example articles to see how the moves and conventions explained in the class were used in reality. In addition, the data analyses showed that time management skills are vital to become successful academic writers. Thus, one participant expressed her wish for such a time-related guidance as follows:

First, I need to learn how to spare time for academic writing and when and how much I should write. My most urgent need is to learn how to use other scholars' ideas in my paper without plagiarising them and how to comment on these ideas.
[Seher]

Listening to student needs is vital. As [Tavakoli and Tavakol \(2018\)](#) rightly note, writing courses designed without a needs analysis that negotiates learners' realistic wants and needs is one reason that discourage students from producing academic texts.

I also asked the participants what should be done not to be rejected by scholarly journal articles and have a high publication rate. The most commonly stated suggestion was that academic writers or MA/PhD candidates need to get experience by practicing writing more and never feeling afraid of testing writing theory:

The most important suggestion is not to feel afraid of writing. The tasks that loom large at the very beginning turn to easy and manageable ones after we manage to start. We need to practice writing as much as possible and take lessons from our writing experience and mistakes. [Mithat]

Another suggestion was that academic writers need to learn the format and theory of academic writing and follow these conventions closely. Here using clear and concise language was touched upon frequently. In addition, the participants were found to value social experience in writing. They should ask for the help of more experienced ones to utilize their writing experience and observations. Besides, they suggested that academic writers need to learn how to use their time wisely, collect high-quality and real data, conduct a study that fills a void in the related field, and targeting a specific journal before starting writing.

Lastly, I also asked them what to do to become a successful academic writer in English. They offered various suggestions. The most common one was to avoid plagiarism and pay attention to academic conventions closely. This is in line with the well-established nature of academic writing in that it "is not mere an issue of grammar, style and technic, but

rather a more complex set of repeated rules, traditions, and genres that mark civilizations" (Toprak & Yucel, 2020, n.p.). Besides, their emphasis on avoiding plagiarism, i.e., academic theft, could show how well they understood the importance of originality in academic writing. In addition to those two issues, particularly clarity and avoidance of long sentences and repetitions were emphasized. The other suggestions could be listed as follows: not to feel too relaxed and procrastinate, practise writing more, re-read their written products several times before publication process, not haste too much, try to persuade the reader, and conduct high quality research.

In addition to those open-ended questionnaires in the form of self-reports, I asked my students to keep student diaries throughout the term. After my assessment practices at the very end of the term, I collected their diaries. Only four of them handed in their diaries, for I did not urge them to do so. There was a total of 33 entries: Seher (3 entries), Ayşe (8 entries), Canan (12 entries), and Enes (10 entries). The entries were not complete, mostly recorded what was done in the class although they were supposed to be reflective and gave me the impression that most wrote them superficially. They came from different cities, had other serious course requirements, and had professional responsibilities in their institutions. It was confessed by one of the participants, who wrote, "I will be honest with you, procrastination is one of my biggest problems and I am not writing this entry on time" [Enes, November 4th, 2019]. I analyzed the diaries as separate cases below and supported the findings with diary entries with language problems in original.

The entries written by Ayşe clearly show that although she was quite happy to take such a vital course, she was in two minds in that depending on the complexity of the topic each week her self-confidence in her writing skills increased or decreased, and this went on like this through the term. It seems that she was afraid of the overloaded course syllabus. Although she found course content easy to understand "due to my fluent and clear course instruction", with her own words, she confessed that it was difficult to apply them all, and thus she needed much writing practice. To illustrate, on the 30rd of September, she wrote that her confidence in writing gradually decreased, so she started to search for another profession career possibility; she seemed hopeful immediately next week. Her psychological tides and fears could be seen well in the following entry:

Today we covered L.R topic in class. After seeing the way the board is covered, I felt like I got my hopes up quite early about being a good writer. I understood everything you mentioned in the class, but when it comes to applying to our writings, I think I will have a big problem. No problem with class or the way you presented the topic. I will try to keep doing my best, but from now on I am not making any promises for future references. [Ayşe, November 4th, 2019, language problems in original].

Similarly, Canan, who was a fresh research assistant and familiar with academic writing and publishing issues, expressed how happy she was to take the course as there was more to learn for her. She reported that although she liked reading articles on a weekly basis, she emphasised how nervous she felt to have a quiz every week continuously in her entries. Besides, she wrote that she was unhappy as I did not find her literature review strong. This frustration mostly came from the fact that she had been writing her MA thesis as a fresh research assistant, and she thought that she knew much regarding academic writing. Thus, she found herself more experienced than her classmates and did not want to be compared to them.

In line with what Ayşe and Canan wrote, Seher seemed happy to have this how-to-write course: "Though we were familiar to most of them, to learn them in detail makes me feel safe as we are supposed to write a MA thesis next year" [Seher, September 23rd, 2019,

language problems in original]. Unlike Canan, Seher found quizzes at the very beginning of each class on weekly readings both helpful and motivating. Besides, she emphasized that such a how-to-class should be offered much earlier before MA starts: “Lastly, I should say that this course to our BA students as well because we needed this course so much from you especially, in BA as well” [Seher, October 7th, 2019, language problems in original].

Lastly, Enes who had been working as a lecturer for 9 years expressed how nervous he felt, yet he was hopeful and optimistic about the class: “Today, I started my MA and was really nervous about how it would go. It had been a long time since I last sat on a desk as a student. But I ‘m sure I’ll get used to it in time” [Enes, September 16th, 2019, language problems in original]. He thought that taking such a course on the nature of academic writing was valuable as it would encourage them to read academic sources consciously. However, all diaries showed me that the participants had rally heavy course responsibilities in all classes as well as that one, and this would decrease their motivation. They started to feel less hopeful about being an academician:

Another good news was that we might not have classes next week as it will be a national holiday. It would be great as I need some rest. I didn’t have a hectic schedule like this for quite a while. I need to be honest, this makes me really tired and I don’t feel really motivated. However, I will ‘persist despite rejection” [Enes, October 21st, 2019, language problems in original]

Overall, all the diary entries have shown me that the participants all thought that such a how-to-do class socialising writing was vital for their academic career, and they were excited to learn the basics of academic writing, particularly scholarly research article. However, their professional and home-related responsibilities as well as other course requirements all made it difficult to keep pace with the overloaded course syllabus. Besides, in line with the results of open-ended questionnaires, in the diaries the participants wanted to have more writing practice, which could be illustrated in the following participant conclusion and suggestion:

Well, I can say it was positive in terms of the content because we need to have a complete mastery of these basics if we are to become good writers. My only suggestion would be making the students write more. After learning every part/section of the articles maybe we should’ve written a sample. But of course this would make things even more challenging. Too busy is not always better. Sometimes it just makes you feel hopeless. [Enes, December 12th, 2019, language problems in original]

As the excerpt above shows, writing practice is one of the key issues to successful scholarly writing as the more novice write, the easier it gets to write, and in turn, they feel pleased and successful ([Belcher, 2009](#)).

The aim of the current research was to uncover MA candidates’ experiences, needs, wishes, and suggestions in a structured how-to-write for publication course through open-ended questionnaires and student diaries. Overall, the findings show that such a course covering the basics of academic writing and publishing was found vital by the MA candidates. As [McGrail et al. \(2006\)](#) note, such classes are one of the measures to increase both the quality and number of academic publications, increase writing knowledge and enhance writing skills, and increase publication encouragement and motivation, and encourage academics to publish actively. However, as the current findings showed, overloaded course syllabi, other professional, societal, and home-related responsibilities, lack of good time management skills, and writing anxiety sometimes could make it difficult

to keep up with the pace of the class. Besides, they expressed their wish for workshops as the extension of the class where they could see real examples by analysing published articles taken from diverse journals, practising writing, and applying the theory they learnt in the class.

Based on the current research findings, I could offer several pedagogical implications for those who offer professional and formal education about how to write and publish. The frequently stated issue was the importance of practicing academic writing. Thus, lecturers need to negotiate student needs formally or informally and design workshops that equip them with academic writing skills, offer them chance to practice, and socialize writing by encouraging peer collaboration. As suggested by [McGrail et al. \(2006\)](#), such structured writing interventions need to be designed in such a way to allow adaptations to meet the needs and wishes of the participants. Still such workshops may not be enough as some may need extra, constant, and individual help. Thus, writing centers at graduate programs should be set up to offer free assistance and specialized instruction and chance to practice writing as well as provide detailed feedback at both individual and group levels. Students with different academic literary skills and needs should be encouraged to make an appointment with these centers to meet their needs. As the data of the present research show, MA candidates need extra help about ways to cite other scholars' ideas and words in their own papers, i.e., ways to avoid plagiarism such as paraphrasing. These centres may also serve well as audience for these novice writers who do not feel grading anxiety. In addition to tutors offering such professional help, such centres could encourage them to collaborate with their peers and learn from each other.

Another important finding of the study was that these novice writers found the course schedule quite overloaded as these issues were all new to them, for they did not have such a course on academic writing genres, academic conventions, and parts of scholarly research articles. Thus, I think while the theory could be offered in one term, they should be offered a separate workshop-based course immediately in the following term on practicing what has been learned in theory. Besides, while offering the theory, lecturers should offer examples taken from real articles published in diverse journals. Student comments showed that such examples serve as models for them. As "successful scholarly writing "is largely a matter of effective imitation" ([Gastel & Day, 2016, p.12](#)), MA students could benefit a lot by analyzing good example articles taken from good journals. Therefore, teaching staff should bring about good and bad examples on the same topic to analyse in their classroom so that students and particularly non-native ones could get ready for writing their own ones.

As the findings of the current study have shown, starting could turn into a real torture for novice academic writers who lack wise time management skills and thus tend to procrastinate. Therefore, to manage the writing process successfully and save time, they should be shown how to make functional outlines, which could help them see how they should start, which way they should move on, what they should do for implications, how they could avoid possible problems and move on the right track ([Becker, 2007](#)). In addition to time management skills, candidates should be equipped with effective academic writing strategies as the participants utilised very few ones and most did not know how to move on.

Students need an audience while writing; thus, providing regular, detailed, and personal feedback and serving as their audience is vital for the development of novice academic writers. Although Turkish students value teacher authority and trust teacher feedback more than they do to their peers, peer collaboration should be encouraged both to save time for lecturers and make students feel more comfortable. It should be born in mind that making writing social by encouraging students to take such writing classes and encouraging peer collaboration could avoid unwanted situations such as anxiety, boredom, writer block, and procrastination ([Belcher, 2009](#)). Here, a buddy system could be devised in

that experienced and novice writers are paired so that the skills and experiences of the latter could be transferred effectively to the former, and they could serve as audience for each other.

Most importantly, in line with what [Atay and Kurt \(2006\)](#) suggest, writing instruction is to start much earlier than university, and primary and secondary-level students should be encouraged to express their opinions and ideas with production-based tasks. Thus, writing instruction needs to be integrated in national English language curriculum, and instructional materials should cover diverse activities. Here what lies in the crux of the matter is teacher mindset in that teachers themselves should be trained about how to teach writing effectively to various graders in initial teacher training process and supported via in-service teacher training workshops in such a way that they realise the importance of writing skill as a gatekeeper ([Hyland, 2013](#)), thereby becoming informed and feeling motivated to practise writing in their classrooms. It should be kept in mind that we cannot expect our students who are academic candidates to improve this skill on the job ([McGrail et al., 2006](#)).

The current study is not without its limitations. First, the relatively small sample size of this research does not let me as the researcher to generalise the findings to all MA students in diverse education contexts, yet it helped me understand my own case and better my own practice, thereby having the potential to contribute to future students in my institution. Second, the methodological limitations of the current study, i.e., its reliance on self-administered questionnaires and student diaries, need to be noted down. Therefore, to avoid social desirability bias as well as researcher bias, further research could incorporate additional data gathering instruments to triangulate the data such as observation by independent researchers. Also, to ensure a deeper understanding of participant perceptions and experiences, longitudinal study designs could be utilized.

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