



English writing difficulties among students learning English as a foreign language

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Abstract. This study investigated the difficulties faced by university students learning English as a foreign language in developing academic writing skills. Writing remains one of the most challenging language skills for EFL learners, particularly in contexts where systematic writing instruction is limited. The aim of this study was to identify linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical barriers that affect students' writing performance at Bishkek State University. A mixed-methods approach was used. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 60 first- and second-year students, while qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with six English language instructors. The findings revealed several key challenges. More than 70% of students reported experiencing anxiety and fear of making mistakes while writing. Linguistic difficulties such as limited vocabulary and frequent grammatical errors were also identified as major obstacles. In addition, over 90% of respondents indicated that they practiced writing only when it was required by teachers, suggesting insufficient opportunities for regular writing practice. Teachers confirmed that the absence of specialised writing courses and limited training in process writing methodology further complicate effective instruction. The study highlighted the need to strengthen academic writing instruction through structured feedback, increased writing practice, and teacher professional development. The findings of this research would provide great benefits to the instructors of the English language and curriculum designers to address the writing difficulties that might be encountered by learners of English, contribute to the limited research on EFL writing difficulties in Central Asia and offer practical recommendations for improving writing pedagogy in higher education

Keywords: academic writing pedagogy; process writing approach; formative feedback; peer collaboration; revision strategies; learner motivation; higher education

Introduction

In recent years, the issue of academic writing difficulties among students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has attracted increasing scholarly attention worldwide. Academic writing plays a crucial role in higher education, as it enables students to communicate ideas, demonstrate critical thinking, and participate in academic discourse. Several studies have investigated the difficulties EFL students face in academic writing across diverse contexts. These challenges are often associated with insufficient language proficiency, limited exposure to academic genres, and a lack of effective instructional support. Furthermore, psychological factors such as writing anxiety and low self-confidence significantly influence students' ability to produce coherent and well-structured texts.

For instance, G. Alzahrani (2025) examined students at Najran University and found that limited vocabulary,

grammatical errors, poor organisation of ideas, and weak paraphrasing skills hinder learners' ability to produce coherent texts. Similarly, S. Asnas & I. Hidayanti (2024) reported that Indonesian EFL learners struggle with grammar, academic vocabulary, coherence, cohesion, and the construction of thesis statements, highlighting the complexity of developing arguments in academic writing. A. Sulukiyyah *et al.* (2026) emphasised the challenges faced by first-year university students transitioning from high school to tertiary-level writing. Their findings revealed difficulties in maintaining academic style, organising ideas, and developing logical arguments, suggesting that the shift to university writing requires more advanced skills than students typically acquire in secondary education. In the Kurdistan region, B. Mustafa & M. Shahab (2024) identified grammatical errors, sentence structure problems,

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and weak introductions and conclusions as common issues, while also noting students' lack of confidence in their writing abilities. Complementing these findings, S. Aldabbus & E. Almansouri (2022) demonstrated that independent language skills and writing strategies significantly influence integrated writing performance among Chinese secondary EFL students. Their study underscores the importance of both linguistic competence and strategic awareness in producing high-quality academic texts. Likewise, N. Mochizuki (2025) explored EFL undergraduates' genre awareness and cognitive processes, showing that difficulties often stem from limited understanding of genre conventions and inadequate metacognitive engagement during writing. Finally, S. Keller *et al.* (2024) analysed argumentative texts and revealed that weaknesses in language quality, content development, and structural organisation are key indicators of underdeveloped writing skills among EFL learners.

These difficulties are global in nature and appear across countries regardless of the level of development of their educational systems and most empirical studies on EFL writing difficulties have been conducted in East Asian, Middle Eastern, or Western educational contexts. Comparatively little research has explored the challenges faced by university students in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, the specific linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical barriers influencing academic writing development among Kyrgyz EFL learners remain insufficiently examined. Addressing this gap is essential for improving writing instruction in the region and developing context-appropriate pedagogical strategies. Therefore, the present study aimed to identify the main challenges faced by students at Bishkek State University while learning academic writing through the process writing approach. Specifically, the study investigates linguistic difficulties, psychological barriers, and instructional factors that influence students' writing performance. The findings are expected to contribute to the limited body of research on EFL writing in Central Asia and provide practical recommendations for improving writing pedagogy in higher education.

Literature Review

Teaching writing through a process writing approach has become a central component of EFL pedagogy, as it transforms writing into an interactive and recursive activity. Each stage such as prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing develops metacognitive awareness and encourages peer feedback, thereby equipping learners with the skills needed for complex academic writing (Setyawan *et al.*, 2020; Zhang, 2024). Similarly, P. Sulistio *et al.* (2025) investigated the strategies employed by students in academic writing classes and reported that successful writers frequently use planning and revising strategies during the writing process. Recent studies confirm that process-oriented strategies enhance linguistic accuracy and learner engagement, particularly in higher education contexts (Feng, 2025). R. Al-Jarf (2026) offers to change writing pedagogy from product-oriented, error-focused

approaches to process-based, communicative methods that reduce cognitive load and allow students generate ideas before creating a writing piece. Numerous studies have demonstrated that process-based writing instruction can improve both linguistic accuracy and students' engagement in writing activities (Setyawan *et al.*, 2020; Zhang, 2024). Moreover, the process-genre approach has been shown to support international students in adapting to academic conventions and overcoming writing difficulties (Miller & Hulcup, 2025). Teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding these stages, guiding students through revision and providing constructive feedback (Sowell, 2020). Recent research highlights the importance of formative feedback and collaborative learning in strengthening students' revision practices and developing their academic writing competence (Feng, 2025; Tran, 2025). These strategies allow students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing process. F. Teng & J. Huang (2019) reported that the use of self-regulated learning strategies strongly predicts EFL learners' writing proficiency. Students who actively employ strategies such as planning and revising demonstrate higher levels of writing achievement. Supporting this view, L. Teng (2022) argues that explicit strategy-based instruction can significantly improve students' academic writing skills. According to the author, teaching students how to regulate their learning process helps them become more independent and effective writers. At Bishkek State University (BSU), students acquire all four language skills simultaneously through the "Practical Course of the English Language". Writing instruction is integrated from the first year. By the second year, students progress to research writing, which requires more advanced academic skills (Bishkek State University, n.d.). Within this framework, teaching methods vary from product-oriented to process-oriented approaches, as well as task-based learning (TBL) and blended learning.

The integration of diverse pedagogical approaches reflects global trends in EFL writing instruction. For instance, active learning, task-based learning, blended learning, collaborative learning, and cognitive approaches have been identified as effective solutions to writing challenges faced by Malaysian students (Akhtar *et al.*, 2019). These methods emphasise learner engagement, autonomy, and interaction, which directly address motivational and psychological barriers to writing. In particular, M. Alharbi (2021) demonstrated that blended learning not only improves EFL learners' writing performance but also enhances their self-efficacy, thereby reducing writing anxiety and fostering confidence. Taken together, the BSU curriculum and international evidence suggest that combining process-oriented writing instruction with innovative pedagogical strategies such as blended and task-based learning can provide a practical pathway to overcoming the linguistic and psychological difficulties identified in this study. This alignment between local practice and global research highlights the potential for adapting proven methods to the Central Asian context, thereby strengthening students' academic writing competence and confidence.



Despite the benefits of process writing, many EFL learners continue to struggle with academic writing. Research highlights persistent problems such as limited vocabulary, recurrent grammatical errors, weak text organisation, and writing anxiety (Mustafa *et al.*, 2022; Bhandari, 2024). Psychological factors such as low confidence and fear of negative evaluation may further discourage students from actively participating in writing tasks or peer-review activities (Nan, 2018; Tran, 2025). Recent work also emphasises the importance of feedback quality: AI-generated and teacher feedback, when sequenced effectively, can significantly improve revision practices (Tuong & Tran, 2025; Tran, 2025). Motivation remains another critical factor, with studies showing that higher levels of writing motivation correlate with greater proficiency (Cahyono & Rahayu, 2020). Finally, the absence of authentic instructional materials continues to hinder effective implementation of the process writing approach (Kamariah *et al.*, 2018).

Another key factor influencing writing performance is students' belief in their own writing abilities. Previous research has shown that writing self-efficacy plays a crucial role in students' academic writing success. For instance, T. Sun & C. Wang (2020) demonstrated that students with higher levels of writing self-efficacy are more capable of organising ideas and producing structured texts. Similarly, Q. Zhou *et al.* (2022) found that self-efficacy significantly predicts writing performance among EFL university students. Their study revealed that learners who believe in their writing abilities tend to produce more coherent and logically organised essays. C. Wang & B. Bai (2017) validated instruments for measuring EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulated learning strategies, highlighting the close connection between these constructs. Their findings suggest that students with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to apply effective strategies during the writing process. Furthermore, G. Wang (2023) found that self-regulated learning strategies positively influence students' writing self-efficacy, indicating that strategic learning can enhance learners' confidence in completing writing tasks. Individual differences among learners may also influence how students approach writing tasks. A. Umamah *et al.* (2022) explored the role of individual differences in the use of self-regulated writing strategies among EFL learners and found that motivation and prior learning experience significantly affect strategy use.

Finally, metacognitive awareness has also been identified as a crucial element in writing development. D. Zhang & L. Zhang (2019) emphasise that metacognition enables learners to monitor and control their learning processes more effectively. Through metacognitive strategies, students can evaluate their writing progress and improve the quality of their texts. Overall, previous studies highlight the important role of self-efficacy, self-regulated learning strategies, motivation, and metacognitive awareness in the development of EFL writing skills. Understanding these factors can help educators design more effective instructional practices that support students in improving their academic writing competence.

Materials and Methods

The present study employed a mixed-methods research design in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties students experience in learning academic writing. This approach allowed the researcher to combine quantitative data obtained from student surveys with qualitative insights derived from teacher interviews. The research was conducted at Bishkek State University named after K. Karasaev. The university was selected as the research site due to the author's teaching experience, which revealed persistent weaknesses in students' writing skills. The survey and interviews were conducted between September and October 2025 during the fall semester. This timeframe was chosen because students were actively engaged in coursework that required academic writing, allowing the researcher to capture authentic experiences and challenges. The participants consisted of sixty first- and second-year students enrolled in the English language programme and six English language instructors with more than five years of teaching experience. These groups were selected because students at this stage of study are expected to develop academic writing skills, while experienced teachers can provide professional insights into common student difficulties. The majority of student participants were female (52/60) and male (8/60), aged between 20 and 23. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants from courses taught at the university. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent prior to completing the survey or participating in interviews.

Data were collected using two research instruments. First, an anonymous online questionnaire was distributed to students via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of fifteen questions designed to explore students' writing practices, motivation, emotional responses to writing tasks, and perceived linguistic difficulties. Most items were based on multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale responses. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six English language teachers. The interviews included open-ended questions focusing on teachers' observations of student writing difficulties, instructional practices, and possible strategies for improving writing instruction. Each interview lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. Quantitative data from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, in order to identify the most common difficulties reported by students. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Recurring themes related to linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical challenges were identified and interpreted in relation to existing research. All participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. No personal identifying information was collected. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards of the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics (2018).

Results and Discussion

The results of the study revealed several key factors influencing students' difficulties in academic writing. Motivation: Survey data indicated relatively low levels of motivation among students when completing writing tasks (Fig. 1). A significant proportion of respondents reported difficulties maintaining concentration during writing activities. Teachers also confirmed that students often demonstrate limited engagement in writing assignments and tend to avoid tasks that require extended written production.

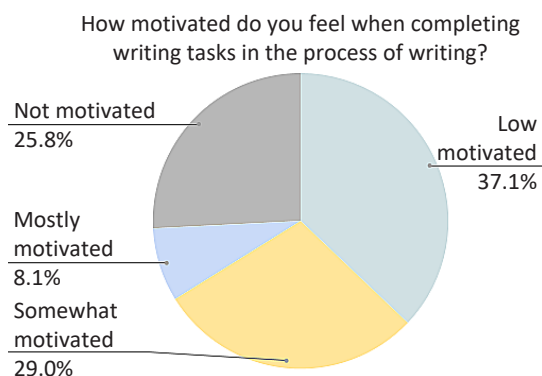


Figure 1. Motivation levels during writing tasks (n = 60)
Source: compiled by the author

Writing Practice and Curriculum: revealed limited opportunities for regular writing practice (Fig. 2). More than 90% of surveyed students reported that they practice writing in English only when it is assigned as coursework. This suggests that students have insufficient exposure to independent writing activities, which may hinder the development of writing fluency and confidence. Teachers emphasised that the lack of specialised writing courses and insufficient professional development opportunities hindered effective implementation of the process writing approach.

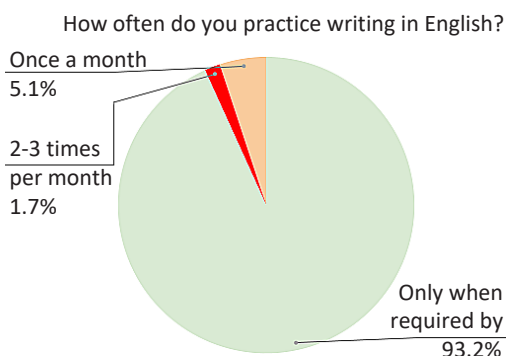


Figure 2. Frequency of English writing practice (n = 60)
Source: compiled by the author

Psychological Barriers were another important factor affecting students' writing performance. More than 70% of respondents reported experiencing anxiety, fear of making mistakes, or uncertainty while writing in English.

These emotional responses appear to negatively influence students' willingness to participate in writing tasks and collaborative revision activities. Self-assessment data indicated that most students rated their writing skills as low, reinforcing the link between lack of confidence and writing anxiety (Figs. 3-5).

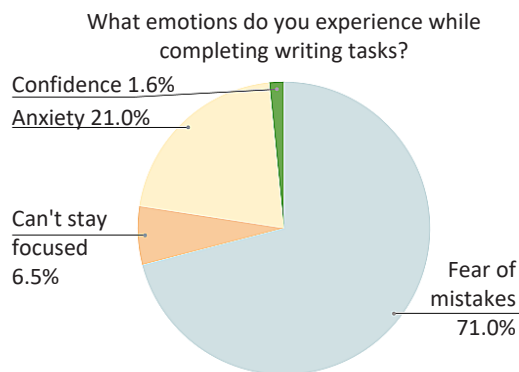


Figure 3. Self-assessment of writing skills (n = 60)
Source: compiled by the author

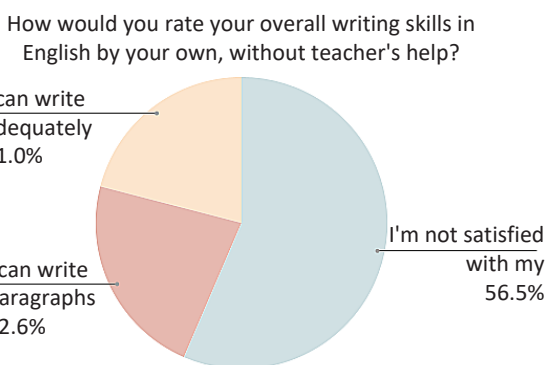


Figure 4. Students' self-perceived writing proficiency (n=60)
Source: compiled by the author

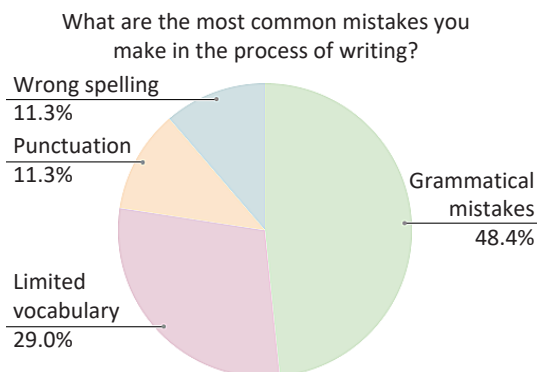


Figure 5. Common mistakes in English writing (n = 60)
Source: compiled by the author

Linguistic Difficulties: the most frequently mentioned problems included limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical errors, and difficulty organising ideas into coherent



paragraphs. Teacher interviews confirmed these observations, emphasising that students often struggle to express complex ideas due to insufficient lexical resources and limited control of English grammatical structures.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' writing difficulties are multifaceted and influenced by a combination of linguistic limitations, psychological barriers, and insufficient writing practice. The findings of this study reveal that academic writing difficulties among EFL students at Bishkek State University are shaped by a complex interplay of motivational, psychological, linguistic, and curricular factors. While similar challenges have been documented in diverse contexts worldwide, the present research contributes new insights by situating these issues within the underexplored Central Asian context (Asnas & Hidayanti, 2024; Mustafa & Shahab, 2024; Alzahrani, 2025). This regional perspective underscores the global nature of EFL writing difficulties while highlighting the need for context-specific pedagogical interventions.

Low motivation and limited engagement in writing tasks emerged as critical barriers. More than one-third of students reported no or low motivation, and over 90% practiced writing only when required by coursework. These findings resonate with B. Cahyono & T. Rahayu (2020), who emphasised the strong correlation between motivation and writing proficiency. However, the novelty of this study lies in demonstrating how insufficient curricular emphasis on independent writing practice in Kyrgyz higher education exacerbates motivational challenges. This suggests that integrating authentic, process-oriented writing tasks into the curriculum could foster greater learner autonomy and sustained engagement (Sulistio *et al.*, 2025; Feng, 2025). Psychological barriers such as writing anxiety and fear of making mistakes were reported by more than 70% of students, reinforcing earlier findings that low confidence and fear of negative evaluation hinder participation in writing activities (Nan, 2018; Tran, 2025). Importantly, self-assessment data revealed that over half of the students were dissatisfied with their writing abilities, which aligns with studies on writing self-efficacy (Sun & Wang, 2020; Zhou *et al.*, 2022). The practical implication is clear: targeted interventions to build self-efficacy through scaffolding, constructive feedback, and peer collaboration are essential for reducing anxiety and enhancing performance.

Linguistic difficulties, including limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical errors, and weak organisation of ideas, were consistent with global findings (Harmer, 2015; Alzahrani, 2025). Yet, the predominance of grammatical errors (49%) and lexical limitations (30%) in this study highlights the urgent need for explicit instruction in academic vocabulary and grammar within the Kyrgyz context. This aligns with K. Hyland (2010), who emphasised the importance of genre awareness and metacognitive engagement in overcoming linguistic barriers. Embedding strategy-based instruction and metacognitive training into writing pedagogy could therefore provide practical solutions. Overall, the study demonstrates that while Kyrgyz EFL learners face challenges similar to those

documented globally, the combination of low motivation, insufficient curricular support, and high psychological barriers represents a distinctive profile. The novelty of this research lies in its contribution to the limited body of Central Asian scholarship on EFL writing, offering empirical evidence that can inform both local curriculum design and broader comparative studies. Practically, the findings by K. Miller & C. Hulcup (2025) and R. Al-Jarf (2026) advocate for a shift from product-oriented approaches toward process-based, strategy-driven instruction, supported by teacher professional development and authentic writing opportunities. Such reforms would not only enhance linguistic competence but also empower students to participate more confidently in academic discourse.

A limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size, which may not fully represent all university students in Kyrgyzstan with writing difficulties. In addition, data collection was based on self-perceived difficulties, which may introduce subjective bias. There were no lesson observations regarding implementing effective strategies with pre/after effect. The survey results indicate that Bishkek State University should include a specialised writing course in its curricula to provide systematic writing instruction, increasing the number of EFL writing teachers and training them, it would facilitate the improvement of students' writing skills. However, since university resources are limited, teachers can participate in a variety of free online courses that focus on teaching writing, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Coursera, and Skillbox. So to address specific weaknesses, teachers at BSU could change the syllabus of the courses and dedicate more hours to implementing the process writing approach. In addition, they are encouraged to create a positive, collaborative atmosphere in their writing classes using personalised assignments, and feedback mechanisms and integrate some online tools such as Grammarly, AI Essay writer, Author Ai. Teachers also can support their students in writing essays in Google Documents. It would be easy for teachers to check students' works through Grammarly AI.

Conclusions

This study examined the challenges faced by Bishkek State University students in developing English writing skills through the process writing approach. The findings revealed four major obstacles: low motivation and lack of engagement with writing tasks; absence of specialised writing courses and insufficient teacher training in process writing methodology; psychological barriers, including fear of mistakes and low confidence; linguistic difficulties, such as limited vocabulary, grammar errors, and weak syntactic control. These results confirm that writing-related issues are systemic and multifaceted, combining curricular, pedagogical, and psychological dimensions. Additionally, the study suggests that students benefit from regular, structured writing practice and timely feedback, which can gradually reduce anxiety and improve linguistic accuracy. The results also indicate that teacher support and targeted instructional strategies play a crucial role in

fostering students' confidence and motivation. Overall, addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts at both curriculum and instructional levels to create a supportive learning environment conducive to academic writing development. Importantly, the study highlights that the absence of structured writing instruction in the university curriculum exacerbates these problems, leaving students underprepared for academic and professional communication.

Future studies should investigate the effectiveness of specific pedagogical interventions (e.g., peer feedback, blended learning, creative writing workshops) in the Kyrgyz context; compare writing challenges across different universities in Kyrgyzstan to identify systemic versus institution-specific issues; explore longitudinal changes in students' writing skills when process writing is consistently integrated into curricula; examine the role of multilingualism (Kyrgyz, Russian, English) in shaping writing competence and confidence. By situating Kyrgyz students'

experiences within broader international scholarship, further research can contribute to developing context-sensitive strategies for improving EFL writing instruction in Central Asia.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study.

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Англис тилин чет тили катары үйрөнгөн студенттердин жазуу кыйынчылыктары

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Аннотация. Бул изилдөө англис тилин чет тили катары үйрөнүп жаткан университет студенттеринин академиялык жазуу көндүмдөрүн өнүктүрүүдө туш болгон кыйынчылыктарын изилдөөгө арналган. Жазуу тилдик көндүмдөрдүн ичинен эң татаалдарынын бири болуп саналат, айрыкча жазууну системалуу окутуу жетишсиз болгон шарттарда. Изилдөөнүн максаты – Бишкек мамлекеттик университетинин студенттеринин жазуу ишмердүүлүгүнө таасир эткен лингвистикалык, психологиялык жана педагогикалык тоскоолдуктарды аныктоо болду. Изилдөөдө аралаш ыкма колдонулду. Сандык маалыматтар 1- жана 2-курстун 60 студенти арасында жүргүзүлгөн сурамжылоо аркылуу чогултулса, сапаттык маалыматтар англис тилинин алты окутуучусу менен өткөрүлгөн жарым-жартылай структураланган маектердин негизинде алынган. Жыйынтыктар бир катар негизги көйгөйлөрдү көрсөттү. Студенттердин 70 %дан ашыгы жазууда ката кетирүүдөн коркуу жана тынчсыздануу сезимин баштан кечирерин белгилешкен. Ошондой эле чектелген сөз байлыгы жана грамматикалык каталар сыяктуу лингвистикалык кыйынчылыктар негизги тоскоолдуктар катары аныкталды. Мындан тышкары, респонденттердин 90 %дан ашыгы жазуу менен мугалим талап кылганда гана машыгышарын билдиришкен, бул үзгүлтүксүз жазуу практиканын жетишсиздигин көрсөтөт. Окутуучулар да жазуу боюнча атайын курстардын жоктугу жана процесске негизделген окутуу ыкмасы боюнча даярдыктын жетишсиздиги окутууну татаалдаштырганын тастыкташты. Изилдөө академиялык жазууну окутууну жакшыртуу үчүн структураланган кайтарым байланыш берүүнүн, жазуу практикасын көбөйтүүнүн жана окутуучулардын кесиптик деңгээлин жогорулатуунун зарылдыгын белгилейт. Алынган жыйынтыктар англис тилинин окутуучуларына жана окуу программаларын иштеп чыгуучуларга студенттердин жазуудагы кыйынчылыктарын жоюуда пайдалуу болушу мүмкүн. Ошондой эле бул изилдөө Борбордук Азияда англис тилин чет тили катары үйрөнүү шартындагы жазуу көйгөйлөрү боюнча изилдөөлөрдүн чектелүү санына салым кошуп, жогорку билим берүүдө жазууну окутуу методикасын жакшыртуу боюнча практикалык сунуштарды берет

Негизги сөздөр: академиялык жазуу педагогикасы; жазууну окутуунун процессуалдык ыкмасы; калыптандыруучу кайтарым байланыш; студенттердин өз ара кызматташуусу; редакциялоо стратегиялары; үйрөнүүчүлөрдүн мотивациясы; жогорку билим берүү



Трудности письма у студентов, изучающих английский язык как иностранный

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Аннотация. Данное исследование посвящено изучению трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются студенты университета, изучающие английский язык как иностранный, при формировании навыков академического письма. Письмо остается одним из наиболее сложных видов речевой деятельности для изучающих английский язык, особенно в условиях ограниченного системного обучения письму. Целью исследования было выявление лингвистических, психологических и педагогических барьеров, влияющих на письменную деятельность студентов в Бишкекском государственном университете. В исследовании использовался смешанный метод. Количественные данные были получены с помощью анкетирования 60 студентов первого и второго курсов, а качественные данные – в результате полуструктурированных интервью с шестью преподавателями английского языка. Результаты показали ряд ключевых проблем. Более 70 % студентов испытывают тревожность и страх допустить ошибки при письме. Существенными препятствиями также являются лингвистические трудности, такие как ограниченный словарный запас и частые грамматические ошибки. Кроме того, более 90 % респондентов отметили, что практикуют письмо только по требованию преподавателей, что свидетельствует о недостатке регулярной письменной практики. Преподаватели подтвердили, что отсутствие специализированных курсов по письму и недостаточная подготовка в области процессного подхода к обучению письму дополнительно усложняют эффективное преподавание. Исследование подчеркивает необходимость совершенствования обучения академическому письму за счет структурированной обратной связи, увеличения объема письменной практики и повышения квалификации преподавателей. Полученные результаты могут быть полезны преподавателям английского языка и разработчикам учебных программ для преодоления трудностей письма у студентов, а также вносят вклад в ограниченное количество исследований, посвященных проблемам письменной речи в условиях изучения английского языка как иностранного в Центральной Азии, и предлагают практические рекомендации по совершенствованию методики обучения письму в высшем образовании.

Ключевые слова: педагогика академического письма; процессный подход к обучению письму; формирующая обратная связь; взаимное сотрудничество студентов; стратегии редактирования; мотивация обучающихся; высшее образование