

Exploring National University Students' Challenges of Academic Writing at the Masters Level

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

The researcher has asserted academic writing's importance and demanding nature for EFL postgraduate students at the master's level. The study explored the challenges faced by national university students in academic writing at the master's level and also identified potential solutions. A qualitative case study approach was utilized to provide a rich and in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. For the selection of participants who meet the criteria of the study and possess specific knowledge regarding the topic, purposive sampling technique was employed. Semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol were used to bring out the participants' responses. Study findings through thematic analysis indicated distinct challenges in the academic writing of the students including knowledge gap in linguistics and writing, lack of critical thinking skills, difficulties in dealing with psychological factors, and inadequate practices at the bachelor's level. Self-directed learning, technological help, reading articles and expanding vocabulary, and seeking help and feedback emerged as potential solutions to cope with these challenges. The current study is significant in filling the gap of the challenges faced by National University students of Bangladesh in academic writing at the master's level and also provided the strategies they used to overcome the challenges, which is less explored in the existing scholarly literature.

Keywords: Challenges; Academic Writing; National University Students';

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my work to my Ammu, my Abbu, my elder sister (Khushi Apu), my younger siblings (Ananna, Zeeshan, and Labonno), my beloved friends Mehnur Jabeen, Shanjana Shormi, Asma Ul Husna, Syeda Farhana Haque, Samia Islam, Faria Noman, Azmari Lea, Noshin Tori, Mehnaz Orpa, Sahadat Hossain, Tafsina Naznin Bijita and also my beloved flatmates Progga Saha, and Titly Titir Sen Apu. Without their continuous support, it would have been impossible for me to complete my thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

English has become the most frequently used language in the modern world and is utilized extensively in all facets of education, both domestically and internationally (Tananuraksaku, 2021). Along with school and college-level education worldwide, English is the primary pedagogical language for higher education. In a range of contexts, higher education students are expected to be able to think critically, conduct research, evaluate, and solve problems (Lewis & Brown, 2021). The four fundamental English language acquisition skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—are taught to students throughout the primary and secondary levels in order to assist them reach this advanced stage.

English Language is used as a lingua franca all over the world; it is widely utilised in educational settings and teaching environments (Seidlhofer, 2013; Ehrenreich, 2012, Griffler, 2003). When English gained recognition as a de facto worldwide language, many students and learners chose to enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational environments. Because of this growing trend, researchers began to examine the challenges faced by ESL and EFL learners. They examined the issues these students encountered, their concerns, and their level of awareness regarding proper usage of English.

In terms of learning a second language, writing is considered as one of the most significant skills that learners should acquire. Writing is regarded as an important and challenging language production skill. It involves developing design concepts and compiling conceptual representations of participant's expertise (Horvath, 2001). Since learning to write is the primary objective, students are required to develop and enhance their writing skills (Bulqiyah, et. Al, 2021; Khazraji, 2019). Additionally, with the aim to improve their writing proficiency, language learners are expected to actively engage in the prewriting, while-writing and post-writing phases of the writing process (Bulquyah, et. Al.,2021; Bakry & Alsamadani, 2015). According to Pablo and Lasaten (2018), writing is more than just putting words on paper, it is a reflection of one's ability to use language effectively, develop and express complex ideas, and engage in abstract thinking. The majority of

second language learners believe that writing is a tough endeavour, they will avoid writing tasks because they find them challenging (Pablo & Lasaten, 2018).

Diverse viewpoints exist among researchers' relation to the definition of academic writing. For instance, Al-Mubarak (2017) defines it as "scientific writing which is portrayed as organised research practiced and utilised by researchers at higher education level" (p. 176). Lavelle and Bushrow (2007), using the phrase "graduate writing process," state it as a method by which learners "make meaning beyond the sum of words." According to Labaree (2009), there is a notion that it is a formal language that students and researchers use in academic contexts to communicate their opinions, present new ideas, and agree on earlier research for other academic writers and scholars.

In line with the literature on graduate students' difficulties in academic writing all around the world, even the most experienced graduate students lack the fundamental skills necessary to compose a piece of coursework (Hemmings et. al., 2007). As stated by Holmes (2018) and Collins (2015), for a variety of reasons, including a lack of confidence in their academic writing, a fear of receiving unfavorable feedback, a lack of time dedicated to writing, and a lack of writing competence, the number of graduate students failing to write academically at graduate school is actually increasing. Therefore, researchers believe that writing is a crucial academic accomplishment for graduate students, despite being more difficult than a language competence that may be quickly learned (Akçaoğlu, 2011).

Moreover, over the past few decades, researchers have examined the issues that ESL and EFL students face when writing for academic purposes such as academic papers, reflective essays, and researchers' proposals. Factors such as different cultural backgrounds, native tongues, and educational systems are responsible for students' struggle with academic writing (Gay, 2013). However, the results of these studies showed that graduate students encounter many challenges when writing, such as poor punctuation, grammatical errors, inappropriate vocabulary selections, poorly organized paragraphs, low-quality research papers and written content overall, a lack of progressive ideas, an inability to adequately and directly address research topics, a failure to adopt an academic tone, style, and attitude, and trouble fulfilling assignment requirements.

In the western context, postgraduate programs usually incorporate supervision, systematic research training, and access to a wealth of resources to make sure that students are equipped to conduct in-depth investigations (Philips & Pugh, 2015). In meeting the demands of students, they also provide existing support networks-such as research workshops, academic writing centers, and advanced online tools (Claudius, 2019).

In many Asian countries, writing in the English language is regarded as a challenge for many postgraduate students (Sokip, 2020). Several research have been conducted in countries like China, India, Malaysia and South Korea dealing with academic writing problems because of limited access to research materials, lack of proper guidance, and language barriers while writing or presenting ideas or thoughts in English (Dwindhandi et al., 2020). These problems are more common in developed countries.

In Bangladesh, writing in English is even more difficult for the majority of university graduates due to a lack of proper training, academic writing difficulties, support systems, and limited research resources (Alam et al., 2020). Like postgraduate students in other ESOL countries, those in Bangladesh also struggle with writing challenges when it comes to write any academic papers, term papers, or research papers at their Masters' level, as English is not their first language and is not emphasised to the same extent during their undergraduate level (Islam & Bari, 2021). A large number of students are completing their Bachelor's degree in English from National University. After completing graduation from a National University most of the students enroll in well-known private universities to complete their postgraduate level education to improve their academic knowledge. This study will explore if there are any academic writing challenges that National University students face when they start their Masters' level at a private university. By understanding the challenges this research aims to provide significant solutions to improve the academic writing skills of the National University students.

1.2 Statement of Problem

This is the age of globalisation and it is proved that English is regarded as the key tool of communication for academic and business purposes. Postgraduate studies are conducted by students worldwide in two stages: both coursework and research. A number of studies on writing difficulty have been carried out all across the world. According to Hayes (2012), writing is an incredibly difficult skill that relies on an extensive mental process (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Therefore, learners require thorough and unambiguous writing instruction, together with a solid grasp of the writing process and other essential elements, in order to generate quality writing (Kao & Reynolds, 2018). Thus, adequate time must be set out for writing lessons and practice in order to comprehend and grasp effective writing teaching (Graham, 2019).

In order to learn more about this issue, this research reviewed recent and relevant literature and discovered that several studies had been conducted to investigate various challenges faced by the postgraduate students while they were required to write academically.

According to Graham (2019), there are four things that could make it more difficult for students to realize effective writing: (1) insufficient time spent in the classroom on writing instruction; (2) not enough writing exercises, especially for extended essays; (3) not using teaching procedures to the fullest extent possible, which results in less depth and intensity of writing instruction; and (4) a lack of digital writing tools in the classroom. Similar to other research, writing difficulties may be caused by a teacher's teaching style, little collaborative learning in the writing classroom, a lack of enthusiasm and motivation, and a lack of time dedicated to writing instruction (Bulqiyah et. al., 2021; Graham, 2019; Kao & Reynolds, 2018).

Perhaps not enough attention is paid to the precise teaching process for writing instruction and the integration of this component to the teaching writing aim, despite the enormous amount of research that has been done (Graham, 2019; Kao & Reynolds, 2012). The writing process is one of the main challenges that students encounter when they write (Bulqiyah, et. al., 2021, Uba and Souidi, 2020), consequently, as noted by Graham (2019), it is crucial to teach students how to carry out critical writing processes including planning and rewriting.

According to Hasan & Rahman's (2019) research, Bangladeshi university students in Malaysia encounter significant challenges when it comes to academic writing. The study evaluates the lack of academic writing instruction and learning at the tertiary level as well as the importance of academic writing proficiency in higher education. In this study, 38 Bangladeshi students were given survey questionnaires to complete in order to gather primary data. The data analysis and inquiry indicate the causes behind the student's writing challenges.

It is assumed that postgraduate level students will have acquired advanced English writing skills by the time they complete primary, secondary, higher secondary and bachelor's level of education, therefore, they can manage any complex writing tasks (Mishra, 2023). Although postgraduate students are supposed to be able to handle any challenging writing assignments, this topic remains underexplored in the context of NU graduates. Therefore, we are unsure whether NU graduates possess advanced English writing skills or whether they frequently find it difficult when it comes to write any academic paper, term paper, assignments or research paper writing at the Masters level. Further studies are needed to give a more comprehensive picture of the true state of academic writing proficiency among Bangladeshi students who have earned bachelor's degrees from the National University. No study has yet been conducted on National University students in Bangladesh to identify whether they have any difficulties with their academic writing after enrolling in a postgraduate program at a private university in Bangladesh to enhance their academic expertise.

To explore the academic writing expertise of NU graduates, the researcher will investigate the educational experiences of NU students at the bachelor's level. Also, it is important to identify the specific writing challenges they face at the master's level and overcome these.

1.3 Central Research Objective

The central objective of this research is to examine Bangladeshi National University students academic writing challenges at the Masters level and to explore how they overcame them.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What types of academic writing challenges do National University students in Bangladesh face while studying at a private university at the Master's level?
2. How do differences of expectations in English teaching and writing between National University and private university programme affect their academic performance?
3. How do they overcome the challenges of academic writing at the Master's Level?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study aims to identify whether National University students have any difficulties with their academic writing after enrolling in a postgraduate program at a private university in Bangladesh. The current study attempts to investigate this particular area because no study has been conducted on this aspect among National University students. The reason for choosing these students as participants is that it is thought that tertiary level students, particularly in the English department, have a good grip on English proficiency. It is crucial to assess their writing expertise for academic purposes, paying particular attention to their critical thinking, academic writing, and linguistic skills. Moreover, scholarly literature has emphasised the academic writing problems of ESOL countries at the master's level of students all over the world except for national university students of Bangladesh.

1.6 Significance of the study

This paper has attempted to find out whether National University students face any challenges in their academic writing after enrolling at a private university in Bangladesh at the postgraduate level. This study will involve participants who completed their Bachelor's in English Linguistics and Literature at a National University and their Master's at a private university. The objective is to investigate whether they had any challenges with academic writing at the Master's level that were not considered major issues during their undergraduate education. Current academic literature shows that most of the studies related to various types of academic writing challenges have taken place in the context of postgraduate students from numerous Asian countries. Moreover, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has yet been conducted on National University students in Bangladesh to investigate whether they encounter any academic writing difficulties after graduating from National University with a bachelor's degree in English and enrolling in a master's program at a reputable private university in Bangladesh to enhance their academic expertise. This study will emphasize the importance of paying attention to and taking responsibility for National University students if there are any difficulties they encounter in their academic writing and will try to provide extensive solutions to overcome the challenges and to develop effective writing and enhance critical thinking.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The main focus of this study is to review the existing literature related to postgraduate students' difficulties with academic writing, with a particular emphasis on NU graduates in Bangladesh pursuing master's degrees at private universities. This chapter thus discusses the transition between academic writing expectations and the strategies students employ to overcome them is covered in this chapter along with global, regional (Asian), and local (Bangladesh) perspectives on academic writing at the postgraduate level. This chapter also seeks to find a gap in the research concerning the academic writing challenges faced by NU graduates at the master's level and to emphasize how it is relevant for bridging that gap.

2.1.1 Writing and Academic Writing

Writing is one of the most difficult language skills (Dwiandini et al., 2013), and it is much more difficult for EFL students because the writing process necessitates that the writer come up with original ideas for a piece of writing on a certain subject. The idea of writing was expounded by numerous experts. For example, Braun (2006) claimed that writing is a productive ability that calls for both emotion and consideration. Furthermore, according to Harmer (2006), writing is a communication tool used to express and convey ideas in written form. Even though the definitions given by experts appear to differ, they all agree that writers use writing as a means of generating ideas and expressing their thoughts. As a result, EFL students who lack sufficient writing skills will probably find it difficult to establish, organize, and communicate their ideas in a single written piece.

Academic writing is one of the various forms of writing. According to numerous researchers, it serves a variety of goals. Scholars such as Hyland (2006), Liu (2013), Singh (2018), and others have recognized the importance of academic writing. It is frequently produced by professors,

lecturers, teachers, and students in educational settings. Writing that draws important strategies like planning, editing, revising, and publishing is unique in academic settings (Duffy, 2012).

In educational contexts, academic writing is referred as a formal and structured communication style to present critical concepts, arguments and research findings (Bitchener et al., 2017). Similarly, as stated by Valdés (2019), academic writing is essential as it exhibit students learning, participate in scholarly discourse, and contribute to the development of knowledge in their field which serves as a bridge between learning and scholarly engagement. According to Badreddine (2019) emphasizes that academic writing not just involves with language skills, it also entails understanding the rhetorical and structural rules unique to academic genres, including research papers, dissertations, essays and literature reviews. Academic writing in higher education promotes scholarly identity, analytical thinking, and intellectual discipline in addition to being a tool for assessment (Indhu, 2022).

2.1.2 The Importance of Academic Writing at the Postgraduate Level

There are a number of explanations in the literature for why academic writing is so important at the Postgraduate level. Many scholars believe that having strong writing abilities is important in social and educational contexts due to the development of written and textual activity forms the fundamental foundation of institutions (Flaherty & Choi, 2013).

In accordance with Barton (2017), academic writing involves more than just the orthographic steps that students can sketch or print on a screen. Nonetheless, it has a valuable and well-structured selection of concepts in which the author contributes and provides their views, viewpoints, opinions, experiences, and facts to the audience (Barton, 2017). Thus, academic writing and student achievement in higher education are highly correlated (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007). Therefore, in order to give themselves the opportunity to voice their opinions and contribute to the context and analysis that strengthens them up within an intellectual community, postgraduate students must become proficient in academic writing. In contrast, Kellogg (2001) thinks that writing is a cognitive activity that tests students' capacity for successful concept expression and their ability to think clearly. According to Al-Fadda (2012), the ability to "access, evaluate, and synthesize the

words, ideas, and opinions of others" is necessary for postgraduate students to succeed in academic writing.

Research papers, journal articles, and academic essays (such as narrative, descriptive, explanatory, or persuasive) are among the many forms of academic written texts produced by postgraduate students. According to Roongrattanakool (1999), students must produce a number of challenging academic writing assignments, such as research papers, theses, dissertations, and reports. They must also write deliberately, present their thoughts rationally, and be able to explain their ideas and provide clarification when necessary. Zhu (2004) stated that, postgraduate students should be aware of certain aspects of academic writing such as unity, logical organisation, sentence structure, paragraph development, and grammatical accuracy.

2.2 Academic Writing Challenges for ESOL Students

Badreddine (2019) presented a simpler definition of academic writing. According to him, any writing that addresses academic subjects is considered academic writing. Valdes (2019) defined academic writing as formal writing created in an educational environment. Since writing is one of the main ways to assess someone's intelligence and capacity for learning, it is essential that students learn how to write academically. To effectively communicate with readers, writing should include clear and understandable material (Hans, 2017).

Writing is one of the most difficult out of four language acquisition tasks. As a result, it becomes a challenging task for ESL/EFL learners. In addition to the external challenges that learners face, such as transcribing and structuring ideas, vocabulary mastery, language accuracy, and misinterpreting instruction (Ceylan, 2019), writers also experience internal challenges, such as a lack of motivation, interest, and self-confidence, which causes them to experience anxiety when writing (Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

According to Aldabbus (2017), there are several factors that make academic writing more difficult. Another important problem, he continued, is that students do not have enough time in class to learn and practice writing. Additionally, Altaeb, (2018) stated that ESOL students are typically given theoretical instruction on how to compose essays, paragraphs, and sentences before being given

homework assignments and then they are asked to practice writing them at home as homework. Instead of bothering themselves with their homework, the majority of students just use the internet to cut and paste their assignments. There have been numerous researches on essay writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) circumstances to look into topics including writing challenges, writing guidelines, the procedures, and more.

Al Khairy (2013) indicated that one of the causes of ESOL students' poor academic writing proficiency was the instructors' unclear directions. A report by Altaeb (2018) and Fadhel (2017) stated that giving students unfavorable comments makes them afraid to write or convey their ideas, so to keep themselves from making mistakes, they only use the words and phrases they are familiar with. Consequently, students lose their ability to be creative and are limited to using the words and phrases they have learned in order to prevent unfavorable responses from their teachers.

2.2.1 Challenges of Academic Writing in English Classroom

Academic writing presents a number of difficulties for non-native English speakers. In a study among postgraduate students of Saudi Arabia, AlMarwani (2020) found that many students face challenges in academic writing in the English classroom. English is not the first language of the majority of Asian students. Writing in academic purposes requires advanced skills in grammar, vocabulary, and proper knowledge of academic writing style (Ramzan et al., 2023). Any writing produced with the intention of advancing knowledge is referred to as academic writing (Chien, 2015). Izatullah et al. (2022) underscored that proficiency in writing is crucial for writing an Essay, Research Paper, Research Article, or Thesis because master's students are mostly assessed on their writing. Besides these educational systems in many Asian countries, critical thinking and research-based writing are not introduced to students at the early stages (Sara, 2019). She also added that conventional teaching approaches frequently place more emphasis on memorization and rote learning instead of critical thinking and creativity. As a consequence, students might not have the necessary skills to properly organize research papers, cite sources, or make arguments. According to Ghufon (2015), most of the students are often afraid of questioning authority or expressing personal opinions, which is necessary for academic writing. As a result, they struggle to develop concepts or present simple arguments in their writing.

2.2.1.1 Lack of Confidence

According to Dwihandini et al. (2013), one of the most frequent problems EFL postgraduate students have with academic writing is a lack of confidence. He also added that students who lack confidence will feel incompetent and unworthy. Their academic writing will become discouraged and ineffectual as a result. The findings showed that the research participants are not very confident in their ability to choose the titles of their theses. Furthermore, postgraduate students who lack confidence find it difficult to write an appropriate literature review, according to research by Puspita (2019). They rely solely on journals and PDF files because they are unable to locate a reliable source for their reference.

2.2.1.2 Lack of Motivation

Lack of motivation is another psychological issue that EFL postgraduate students deal with. Fueling one's desire to pursue something requires motivation. Motivation describes why people choose to undertake something, how hard they will work at it, and how long they will stick with it (Diferiansyah et al, 2016). According to a qualitative study by Balena & Liwag (2019), their enthusiasm, experience, and interest in their studies will all contribute to their successful completion.

2.2.1.3. Linguistic Factors

In academic writing, linguistics is considered as one of the most crucial components. because it will establish the writing's actual content. According to Lim (1975), Linguistics is the scientific study of language. Linguistics encompasses a wide range of language-related components. According to earlier research, grammar, vocabulary, and paraphrasing are the three primary linguistics issues that postgraduate students face.

I. Grammar

Grammar is the first language barrier that students must overcome. Dwihandini et al. (2013) looked into the variables influencing postgraduate students' academic writing challenges. According to the data, 73% of respondents said that one of the difficulties they encountered when writing a thesis was linguistic problems, specifically grammatical errors. They struggled to reduce the number of grammatical mistakes in their thesis. In relation to a study by Mohamed & Zouaoui (2014), one of the main obstacles that students have when writing is a lack of grammatical understanding. Students were found to frequently make grammatical mistakes in their writing.

II. Vocabulary

Vocabulary presents another language challenge. Al-Khasawneh's (2010) qualitative study revealed that vocabulary is one of many challenges that students encounter. Students' use of vocabulary in their writing appears to have significantly increased. Pratiwi (2016) also investigated students' challenges with English writing. The findings showed that the students found vocabulary to be the most challenging component. In this context, students' vocabulary is quite little, they frequently employ the wrong words, and their sentences have unclear meanings.

III. Paraphrasing

To make anything easier for readers to understand, paraphrasing is a strategy that involves rephrasing and using the words of experts. According to Baley (2011), paraphrase is the act of changing words from an original source without significantly altering their meaning. Paraphrasing is commonly used in academic writing, such as essays, research papers, research articles, or theses, to prevent plagiarism. Thus, those who struggle with paraphrase will suffer greatly.

According to a mixed-method study by Puspita (2019), students most frequently struggled with paraphrasing. Every respondent stated that one of the reasons they struggle with academic writing is paraphrasing. Grammar mistakes, a limited vocabulary, and an inability to comprehend phrases are the main causes of poor paraphrasing skills. Additionally, Dung (2010) investigated the paraphrasing experiences of EFL students in academic writing. The findings indicated that change

from the original sentence, citation of the original text, ignorance of the skill's significance, and a lack of desire to construct the sentences are the main causes of paraphrasing difficulties.

2.3 Potential Solutions

A number of articles about postgraduate students' difficulties with academic writing were examined by the researcher. To facilitate the review process, the researcher separated it into three primary solutions: self-regulated strategy, seeking assistance from others, and feedback.

2.3.1 Self-Regulated Strategy

According to McNeill (2024), self-regulation is "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions intended to attain specific educational goals. He also suggests that students can monitor and improve their learning with the help of self-regulated approaches. Zimmerman (2019) argued that, self-regulation in learning occurs in three stages: performance, self-reflection, and foresight. Planning ahead involves getting ready for learning phases, where students create personal learning management systems. Performance is the capacity to pay attention and do well during the learning process. The final one is self-reflection, which describes the final thoughts that students have after finishing their coursework.

In many aspects, students gain a great deal from using self-regulated strategies. Previous research demonstrated the numerous benefits that self-regulated techniques offer students, particularly in the area of writing. Research shows that self-regulated techniques can enhance the writing experience and performance of any student. Hammann (2022) found that such techniques make writing more enjoyable. Similarly, Hacker et al. (2015) and Mehrabi et al. (2016) discovered that self-regulated strategies lead to better results in academic writing.

2.3.2 Seeking Assistance from Others

It is vital for students to have the support of their peers, family, friends, and supervisor in order to overcome the difficulties they face when writing for academic purposes. According to Almatarneh et al. (2018), the best approach to overcoming obstacles in academic writing is to ask for assistance and strategies from peers, seniors, supervisors, and classmates. Wang and Yang's (2019) found that students' performance in academic writing can be greatly improved with the assistance of those around them.

2.3.3 Feedback

Feedbacks are another form of tactic that EFL students can employ to get over their academic writing obstacles. Feedback from peers, and supervisors can help students grow more quickly and improve the quality of their work. Wang and Yang (2019) emphasized that peer and supervisor support, in the form of remarks and recommendations, could help students advance their work. Yao et al. (2017) showed that to improve students' performance, feedback is particularly important.

2.4 Research Gap

For non-native English-speaking countries, postgraduate academic writing obstacles are a common issue. There have been reports of difficulties producing EFL postgraduate research findings in educational settings in America (Shang-Butler, 2021), New Zealand (Shen et al., 2019), Algeria (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020), Columbia (Gomez, 2019), Tanzania (Komba, 2020), and Malaysia (Imani & Habil, 2022). For instance, Sadeghi and Khajepasha (2019) reported that due to low experience with research-based academic writing in English, postgraduate students in Malaysia experienced difficulties with thesis writing. Among other researchers, Bitchener and Basturkmen (2020) showed the supervisors' belief that students struggled with generalization, developing ideas and particularly with language proficiency. Students also mentioned a lack of understanding on how to connect ideas, language proficiency, lack of critical thinking skills, and their writing's simplicity, which made their writing monotonous. The incapacity to compose lengthy passages and write in an inappropriate style have been related to poor writing skills.

According to a mixed-methods study by Puspita (2019), students most often struggled with paraphrasing. Furthermore, Dung (2010) explored that grammatical mistakes, limited vocabulary, and an inability to comprehend phrases are the primary consequences of EFL students insufficient paraphrasing skills. According to other studies, like Komba and Chiwamba (2022), students in South Africa struggled to write academic papers due to a lack of supervisory support, their supervisor's workload, and poor feedback, which made them unsatisfied.

In the context of Bangladesh, lots of studies have been conducted on academic writing challenges at the secondary, higher secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels, especially for students in ESOL environments. For example, Karim et al. (2017) investigate the English paragraph writing issues faced by Bangladeshi EFL students. Using a survey questionnaire, the empirical research gathered quantitative data from forty-three students from English majors. According to the investigation, planning, drafting, and revising are the three stages of writing that the students struggle with the most. The students have several writing difficulties. Using idioms, using the correct words, using synonyms and antonyms, and other things are some of these challenges. According to the report, students are proficient in brainstorming. However, they struggle with transforming their thoughts and understanding into words.

According to Afrin (2020), writing is a major challenge for many ESL upper secondary and university students. Poor writing abilities have a negative impact on their final grades. According to the study, a lack of school attendance, pre-stage students' educational proficiency, underqualified teachers, an inefficient curriculum, etc., are all contributing factors to children's poor foundation of writing ability (Afrin, 2019). She suggests that teaching writing skills to Bangladeshi university students is urgently needed. In order to improve student's writing abilities, she suggests identifying and analyzing their issues and putting in place an appropriate writing module.

After looking through a number of sources, existing literature identifies a number of difficulties that postgraduate students encounter in academic writing in various educational settings. For instance, existing research conducted in China, India, Malaysia and South Korea have addressed problems such as inadequate instructions, language obstacles in academic writing, and limited access to research materials (Dwindhandi et al., 2020; Sokip, 2020). To date, there is no study has yet been conducted on National University students in Bangladesh to identify whether they have

any difficulties with their academic writing after enrolling in a postgraduate program at a private university in Bangladesh to enhance their academic expertise. Therefore, this study intends to fill this research gap by emphasizing the importance of paying attention to and taking responsibility for National University students if there are any difficulties they encounter in their academic writing at the Masters' level and will try to provide extensive solutions to overcome the challenges and to develop effective writing and enhance critical thinking.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research methodology adopted for conducting this study. As mentioned before in Chapter One, the main purpose of this study is to explore National University Students Challenges of Academic writing at the master's level in Bangladesh. The second research question seeks to find out the differences of expectations in English teaching and writing between National University and private university programme whether those affect their academic performance at the master's level and the third research question attempts to discuss how they overcome the challenges that arise writing academically at the master's level. The study is conducted by researchers using qualitative methodology. Furthermore, the research questions will also guide the researcher in her quest to achieve the study's objective. This chapter also describes the rationale behind selecting a qualitative approach, including the research design, the process of selecting the participants, Interview protocol for data collection, framework of data analysis, and ethical considerations to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

3.2 Research Design

The present study has established a research design, which was developed by a comprehensive review of extant academic literature and the relevant research questions. This study's main goal is to find out if there are any challenges that NU students faced in their academic writing after enrolling in a master's programme at a private university that is located in a non-native environment. A qualitative approach has been chosen to conduct the study.

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), qualitative research methods aim to gather insight into people's attitudes and perceptions about experiences. The primary objective of conducting a qualitative study is to gain an extensive understanding of any context relevant to the objective. It is especially helpful in this study in understanding whether NU graduate students face difficulties in English writing tasks at their masters' level. A semi-structured interview has been conducted as

a data collection tool to gain information. The questions were open-ended and aimed to convey participants' own reflections and opinions.

Three research questions (RQ) for this study have been developed, and in response to those RQs, the researcher has established a set of questions for the interview guideline. Throughout the study, 3rd person "The researcher" has been used for the convenience of narrating and describing the findings.

Purposive sampling technique is utilized to recruit participants for this study (Abbas, 2023) to select participants who meet the inclusion criteria of the study. The researcher opted to utilize Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method for qualitative data analysis. Purposive sampling technique is utilized to recruit participants for this study (Abbas, 2023) to select participants who meet the inclusion criteria of the study. The components of the research layout are covered in detail in the chapter's subsequent parts.

3.3 Selecting the Participants

Purposive sampling gives researchers the ability to focus on particular traits or populations that are important to their work, which improves the relevance and comprehensiveness of the data they gather (Bernard et al, 2016; Creswell, 2013). This sampling technique is usually used to extract information-rich data from the accessible sources (Patton, 2002).

The main inclusion criteria for participants' of this study is to identify students who had graduated from the National University within Dhaka region. The second criterion for selection is to choose participants who hold a Bachelor of Arts degree from the English department and completed their Masters level in English from a private university. In Bangladesh, it is known that English department students typically demonstrate good English proficiency. Third, the researcher explained the study's benefits and goals. The researcher assured the participants that their data will be kept private and that they will remain anonymous. The participants are five in number to observe their rigorously and conduct in-depth research. Purposive sampling is applied in this study to select individuals capable of providing relevant and rich data (Black, 2010). The researcher focused on those who meet the criteria rather than selecting participants at random from a vast

population. Participants are chosen by the researcher solely based on their proximity; the accuracy of their representation of the community as a whole is not be taken into consideration.

3.4 Settings

All the participants of this study were selected from the Dhaka division. The initial interview was conducted through an online platform according to the participants' preferences at a selected time so that the participants feel comfortable attending as a part of this research. Participants are informed about their availability to attend the initial interview over the phone.

3.5 Interview Protocol

The protocol for conducting and designing the semi-structured interviews for this research study is adapted from Kvale's Seven Stages of Interviewing (1996).

Kvale's Seven Stages of Interviewing provides a comprehensive framework covering:

1. Thematising: Clarify the purpose of the interview.
2. Designing: Plan the interview format and questions.
3. Interviewing: Conduct the actual interview.
4. Transcribing: Turn verbal data into written format.
5. Analysing: Extract themes and insights.
6. Verifying: Ensure validity and reliability of the data.
7. Reporting: Present findings clearly and ethically.

In phase one, the researcher conducted a recorded Zoom meeting, greeted everyone warmly and provided a brief overview of herself and the research. The purpose of the interview was then clarified by the researcher. In phase two, the researcher gave attention to how the questions will be asked to ensure a natural and engaging flow of conversation, and for that, the researcher focused on the logical arrangement of questions, progressing from broad to specific issues. In phase three, the researcher started the online interview with a few generic, non-intrusive questions to get to know the participants. Demographic information (such as age, gender, occupation, etc.) was also collected. The interviews followed a structured protocol, with the main questions organised into

three themes that align with the research objectives: (1) identifying the types of challenges, (2) difference of expectation in English teaching and writing between NU and private universities, and (3) exploring strategies to overcome them. Probing and follow-up questions were used to gain deeper insights into certain responses.

In phase four, the interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy, including non-verbal cues where relevant. In phase five, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes. In phase six, the recorded interview provided the data validity and reliability, and lastly, in phase seven, the collected qualitative data were analysed thematically to present clear and ethical findings.

3.6 Data Analysis Framework

A framework for systematic qualitative analysis is used for this study (Braun, 2006). Gathered data through interviews were analysed using transcription, coding and thematic creation (Kvale, 2007). Relevant data segments were identified through open coding and categorised into themes that were aligned with the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The thematic analysis approach enables a thorough examination of the difficulties students faced in their academic writing.

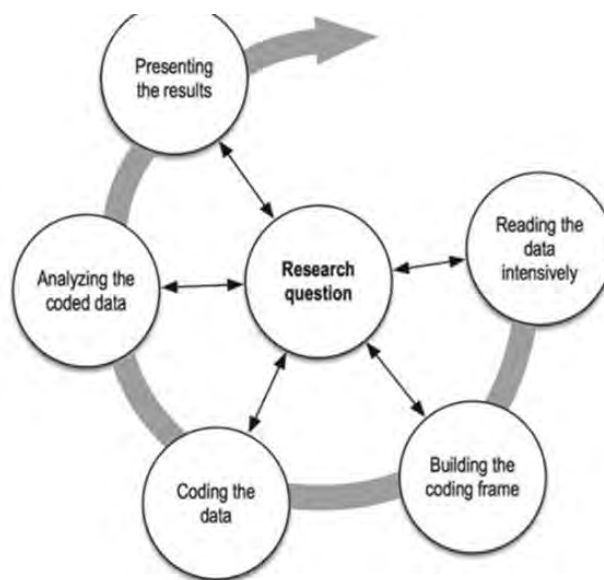


Figure 3.1 Five phases of qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Before beginning the data collection procedures, ethical issues were carefully considered in the conduct of the current investigation. At the beginning of the interview session, participants were given an “informed consent form” (Appendix A) which they were asked to carefully read over and sign. The form provided a detailed outline of the interview sessions' phases and clarified the roles and responsibilities that were expected of the participants during the study. Confidentiality of this research data has been maintained to honor their dignity. Any kind of personal information was not revealed while analyzing data. To keep the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were used. The researcher has restrained from showing any judgmental statement about participants' identities.

CHAPTER FOUR : FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to investigate whether National University students who enroll in a postgraduate program at a private university in Bangladesh encounter any difficulties with their academic writing. This chapter attempts to cover two main concepts. The research findings are presented in the first point. The research's discussions are expanded upon in the second point.

4.1 Research Findings

The researched concentrated on examining the particular kinds of challenges that came up in the interviews. A multiple case study technique was used to perform in depth analysis of the experience of each participant. Through examining subtleties, each participant's experience was investigated withing the context of personal journey.

This chapter presents the study's findings based on the following research questions:

1. What types of academic writing challenges do National University students in Bangladesh face while studying at a private university at the Master's level?
2. How do differences of expectations in English teaching and writing between National University and private university programme affect their academic performance?
3. How do they overcome the challenges of academic writing at the Master's Level?

The interviews for this research were conducted through Zoom app. The selected five participants for this research had completed a Bachelor's degree in English from a national university and a Master's degree in English from a private university. All of them came from Bangla medium background, and all were Bangladeshi nationals. The identity of the participants is covered by using pseudonyms to respect their privacy.

Participants' Profile

Participants Name	Age	Gender	Academic Background	Subject/Major	Nationality
1. Samia	29	Female	Completed Master's from East West University	English (ELT)	Bangladeshi
2. Anika	28	Female	Completed Master's from ULAB	English (ELT)	Bangladeshi
3. Era	30	Female	Completed Master's from BRACU	English (ELT)	Bangladeshi
4. Nahida	29	Female	Completed Master's from BRACU	English (ELT)	Bangladeshi
5. Faria	28	Female	Completed Master's from University of Asia Pacific University	English (ELT)	Bangladeshi

4.1.1 Challenges in Academic Writing

According to EFL students who participated in this research, they stated that they faced challenges in academic writing at their master's level. Based on the interview, four interrelated themes emerged: Linguistics and Writing Knowledge Issues, Lack of Critical Thinking Skills, Dealing with Psychological Difficulties, and Inadequate Academic Writing Practices at the Bachelor's Level. The first theme linguistics and writing knowledge issues is discussed under three sub-themes.

4.1.1.1 Linguistics and Writing Knowledge Gap

The first theme that came to light was the difficulty with language and writing. These two elements are very crucial when it comes to writing academically. The findings discovered three linked sub-themes within this area, including grammar, vocabulary, and paraphrasing. The sub-themes are discussed as follows:

- i) **Grammar:** The participants shared a feeling that academic writing in English is challenging due to the grammatical issues they face. When asked about the challenges of academic writing in the English language at their master's level, three participants reported their problems with English grammar. One of the interviewees Samia stated, "I always fear of making grammatical mistakes while writing answers properly. Even before starting to write, I used to take time thinking about what I should write. It is very time-consuming."

"I had problems with tense and preposition; therefore, the fear of making grammatical mistakes made writing difficult for me. I was not entirely able to come up with ideas for writing in the pre-writing stage and typically took time translating my ideas from Bangla to English.

Similar to Samia, Era also stated that:

"Writing in English is challenging for me, as I don't have proper knowledge of grammar. I found it very challenging dealing with grammar. That's why I used to memorize the answers at my bachelor's level."

Besides that, Nahida mentioned that,

"I struggled with grammar. I frequently had trouble using the proper tenses and correct forms of verbs, as well as the appropriate prepositions."

- ii) **Vocabulary:** Vocabulary was another issue the participants faced while writing for academic purposes. In response to the interviews, three out of five participants said they had trouble with vocabulary. For an example, Faria said:

“Vocabulary is not a limited thing. The more I read new things, the more vocabulary I can learn. During my bachelor’s level, I learned much new vocabulary; the same for my master’s level—there I was also introduced to much new vocabulary. But when I tried to write, I struggled with vocabulary; I couldn’t recall the correct word in English that I wanted to use in my sentence. Usually, I used the common words in my writing, as I had limited knowledge of synonyms for the general vocabulary, which made my writing very low quality.”

Another participant Anika also said that vocabulary is one of the most challenging aspects. She stated:

“In terms of vocabulary, I often use the same words over and over again, and I find it quite difficult to discover words that have the same meaning as what I'm looking for.”

Besides that, Era shared her difficulties with vocabulary. She said that:

“I had some small difficulties coming up with synonyms and using suitable diction when writing any academic paper in English at the master's level.”

Three out of five interviewees revealed that their vocabulary problems are associated with their inability to find synonyms.

iii) Paraphrasing: Paraphrasing is an integral part to maintaining the credibility of the writing. But three participants mentioned having problems in paraphrasing while writing for academic purposes. Nahida stated:

“As I mentioned earlier, my vocabulary knowledge was limited, and due to the limited knowledge of vocabulary, several times I faced challenges in paraphrasing sentences. when I started writing and exploring new topics, I realized that my writing would have been much better if I had enriched my vocabulary knowledge.”

Era shared a similar experience to Faria, stating that:

“One of the challenges I faced while paraphrasing texts was figuring out which synonyms best suited the topic of a given sentence or paragraph and how to employ them. However, choosing or

altering the words might occasionally be challenging because doing so would render the idea incomplete or incorrect.”

Anika expressed facing a similar issue, she mentioned, “In my perspective, the most challenging aspect of paraphrasing a text is changing the words, particularly because I don't have a large vocabulary.”

The findings suggests that for effective paraphrasing a strong vocabulary knowledge is very important. Anika addressed she had trouble changing words, while Era said she needed assistance coming up with appropriate terms to fit the paragraph or sentence. Similarly, Faria also claimed that her limited vocabulary knowledge made paraphrasing a sentence difficult for her.

4.1.1.2 Lack of Critical Thinking Skills

One of the most appreciated outcomes of tertiary education is critical thinking. The findings reveal that Private universities in Bangladesh typically use practical learning and skill-based learning curriculum, while National universities followed a regulated curriculum. The findings additionally demonstrate weaknesses in students' critical thinking skills, since their writing frequently lacks consistency and analytical depth.

According to Nahida, “Although we were encouraged to think critically in class at our bachelor’s level, however, as I mentioned earlier, I often relied on memorizing answers to achieve a good CGPA, which became a weakness for me. As the four-hour written exam required answering ten brief questions, five short questions, and five broad questions, so it was difficult for me to use critical thinking when writing exam answers. However, my lack of strong critical thinking abilities, which are crucial for writing academic papers, made academic writing difficult for me at the beginning of my Master's level.”

Era also highlighted the same issue, she also added that: “I used to memorize answers at my bachelor’s level. That why there was a gap in my critical thinking skills.”

The results of the data analysis indicate that students at National University struggled with critical thinking abilities. As a result, when they had to write an academic paper for their master's degree, they suffered. At the bachelor's level, they were unaware of the need of critical thinking abilities. They were unable to improve their critical thinking abilities because of the habit or practice of memorising answers.

4.1.1.3 Dealing with Psychological Difficulties

Based on the interviews with the participants, dealing with psychological difficulties emerged as one of the primary themes related to challenges in academic writing. Every participant reported experiencing these issues at some point during the early stages of their Master's-level studies, making them a common challenge. The participants mentioned the following psychological problems:

“Lack of knowledge in topic selection and academic paper writing was the biggest challenge for me, which created a fear of conducting research, which hinders my confidence.” (Samia)

“At the beginning of the master's level, academic writing looked really difficult for me because I had no prior experience with it. Later, the challenges made me fearful. Most of the time my teacher asked me to revise my paper so many times. Consequently, this made my confidence low and made me lose interest in continuing my master's program.” (Anika)

“We didn't practice or write any academic papers at the Bachelor's level, so it was obviously challenging for me to write academically. Furthermore, my confidence was undermined by the quality of my writing, to the point where I felt as though I could no longer write or even wanted to.” (Era)

“Academic paper writing, or academic writing, is totally a new thing for me at the master's level. After completing a bachelor's degree in English from a national university, I had enough confidence that I could manage my master's level in English easily. However, when it came to writing any academic paper or term paper that time, I realized that there was so much lacking in my previous learning. My academic writing was not up to the mark, that's why my CGPA was not

so good. Due to the lack of knowledge and also the poor grades, I felt low, and I started to lose motivation to write something.” (Nahida)

“Writing academic papers, research papers, term papers, and theses was something I had never done before. So, at the beginning, the problem statement and its importance confused me. I find the literature review to be really challenging because I'm not sure what to review. My supervisor told me that the extensive reviews I did had nothing to do with my study. At first the feedback from my supervisor made a fearful impact on my mind. When I realized that the majority of students, with the exception of myself, could fulfill the academic writing requirement, I occasionally lost confidence and felt depressed.” (Faria)

Interviewing the participants revealed that psychological issues emerged as a significant barrier to their academic writing, as almost all of them reported experiencing feelings of fear, insecurity, and demotivation when they initially began writing for their master's program. A Lack of knowledge in writing academic paper made difficulties in selecting topics, conducting research, or structuring papers. Low grades, poor writing quality and critical feedback from teachers often create negative thinking, because of that, some students lose interest in continuing their studies.

4.1.2 Inadequate Academic Writing Practices at the Bachelor's Level

The interviews reveal a gap in teaching academic writing within the participants' bachelor-level curriculum. Although they had general writing skills in English, they lacked knowledge of academic writing, as it was not introduced at the bachelor level. The difference in teaching and writing expectations between private and national university curricula emerged as a major issue through the interview sessions. These differences initially hinder students' academic performance. Era mentioned that she often realised that the academic writing requirements at the master's level are much higher than at the bachelor's level. She also explained:

It was really difficult for me to adjust to the new standards at the private university's master's programme, as it follows the medium of instruction in English, whereas the National University hardly follows this. Participating in class discussion and writing academic papers were also a

challenge for me; however, I noticed that most of my classmates, who completed their bachelor's at private universities, were already proficient in such tasks, as they were familiar with these activities.

I found master's level considerably more difficult because I didn't know anything about academic writing. Private universities emphasize their master's-level courses on term paper writing. We had to submit a term paper for each course, and at the final stage of our master's level, we had to submit a thesis paper, which was more extensive writing than term paper writing. As I had no previous knowledge or zero knowledge regarding academic writing, the master's level was much harder for me. (Samia)

At the bachelor's level in NU, we were taught nothing about paper writing, so it was entirely new for those of us who enrolled in a Master's program at a private university. I struggled during the first two to three semesters, not just with proper writing, but with the entire process: choosing a topic, writing the literature review, structuring methodology, findings, discussion, and using referencing styles. Until the second semester, my writing quality was poor. The Research Methodology course in the third semester finally taught me the complete writing process, which was a great relief. (Nahida)

All the participants clearly stated that academic writing was entirely new to them. At the bachelor's level, there was no course related to academic writing, they did not know how to conduct research, write a term paper, or prepare a thesis. Consequently, their writing quality was not strong. They had to put in significant effort to learn academic writing and improve their skills. Their statements reveal a clear gap in English teaching and writing expectations between the two systems.

4.1.3 Approaches to Overcoming Writing Challenges

The results of previous discussions and interviews suggest that national university students generally face many challenges at the master's level in private universities. Students employed a variety of tactics to overcome the difficulties involved in master's level research. These strategies intended to enhance their vocabulary, writing abilities, and overall research process.

4.1.3.1 Self-Directed Learning

The participants used self-management strategies to get beyond the difficulties they faced when writing academic papers. The most common self-management technique in this theme is self-reflection. According to the participants in the interview, they thought lack on their own performance and attempted to figure out why it did not go as planned.

To enhance writing ability, Faria shared her personal experience of using self-directed learning strategy like watching English movies, and memorising vocabulary as self-directed learning resources that helped her improve her writing quality. Additionally, this tactic helps in the development of her critical thinking abilities.

Faria stated, “Listening to English conversations on YouTube and watching English movies ultimately helped improve my vocabulary knowledge and critical thinking skills.”

4.1.3.2 Technological Help

Based on the data, the participants overcame their academic writing challenges by utilising technology. Language applications were the first technology used by the participants. All participants admitted that language application was very helpful in the process of academic writing. The participants utilised Grammarly as their language application. For example, Anika claimed that “Grammarly was useful for proofreading her grammar, but she was late to learn about this software. She revealed, “I only used Grammarly to fix my grammar issues at the end of my academic writing. I have benefited greatly from this application in terms of my academic writing.”

Another participant, Era, described her concerns about grammatical errors and was literally amazed when she learnt about the software tool called Grammarly and used it for the first time. She describes that with a few seconds she can check her grammatical mistakes with the support of Grammarly. She also adds that the app offers a suggested correction form, which was really helpful in overcoming grammatical errors. In her interview, Era also talked about the QuillBot app, which is another software tool that helps to check grammar and improve sentence structure. According

to her, "I paraphrased the sentences using QuillBot; it was considerably simpler and more effective for making error-free sentences."

According to participant statements, using Grammarly and Quillbot software can be an alternative to overcoming language barriers, particularly those related to grammar and paraphrase.

4.1.3.3 Reading Articles and Expanding Vocabulary

All participants mentioned the importance of reading articles. They emphasised that the habit of reading articles helped them learn academic writing styles, and they were also able to enrich their vocabulary. Participants, Samia and Anika, added that by reading different types of essays, they were finally able to notice changes in the quality of their academic writing.

For instance, Samia stated: "I noticed a significant change in my writing. This change occurred because I started reading various scholarly articles, which helped me enhance my vocabulary and apply it in my writing."

Similarly, Anika stated: "I started reading articles and newspapers daily to overcome the problem. This eventually helped me learn the patterns of academic writing and also enriched my vocabulary knowledge."

By analyzing the interview data, it is proven that, reading scholarly articles can improve students' writing quality, besides this, it helps them enhance their vocabulary. Besides that, through continuous reading, students can be introduced to various sentence structures, cohesive writings, and rhetorical strategies that are commonly used in academic discourse, as well as learn to organize their ideas logically.

4.1.3.4 Seeking help and Feedback

To clear up any confusion and enhance their work, each participant sought assistance from their supervisors, seniors, and fellow students. Samia shared: "I sought help from my classmates

whenever I encountered something difficult to understand.” Faria also shared the same opinion, she also added, “I consistently tried to get feedback from my supervisor and also sought advice from seniors who had completed their academic papers before.”

According to the study's findings, excellent academic writing necessitates prompt feedback from teachers, and brainstorming with peers and seniors can help provide the ideas required for excellent writing.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The discussion chapter analysed the complex result of the study and put the whole understanding of the study in relation to context. The themes that emerged in the previous chapter were examined in this chapter, observing how they relate to research objectives and literature reviews, and clarifying how they contribute to a deeper understanding of National University students' academic writing challenges at the master's level in Bangladesh. This analysis also attempted to advance the conversation by supporting subtle tactics to improve students' academic writing skills, strengthen institutional writing support, and create a welcoming environment for National University students in Bangladesh who are having trouble with academic writing at the master's level. The existing study aims to address the following questions:

1. What types of academic writing challenges do National University students in Bangladesh face while studying at a private university at the Master's level?
2. How do differences of expectations in English teaching and writing between National University and private university programme affect their academic performance?
3. How do they overcome the challenges of academic writing at the Master's Level?

5.2 Thematic Analysis and Discussion on the Findings Related to RQ 1

5.2.1 Grammar and Linguistic Knowledge Gap

The first research question aimed to investigate the specific academic writing difficulties faced by national university students when transferring to a master's programme at a private university. The findings of this study reveal significant challenges in various aspects of academic writing for National University graduates at the master's level in private universities. The linguistic and writing knowledge gap has emerged as the first challenge. The absence of proper grammatical

usage is the primary concern of this issue, which is most often encountered by three participants out of a total of five participants. Participant's statements indicated their trouble in academic writing occurs due to the absence of proper grammatical knowledge, especially in using auxiliary verbs and tenses. Results of this study is consistent with earlier researched by Abdulkareem (2013) and Ratnawati et al. (2018) that pointed out the common manner of grammatical errors among EFL learners. These errors are often subject-verb agreement, auxiliary verb usage, and the proper use of tenses according to Abrar et al. (2023) and Ariyanti & Fitriana (2017).

5.2.2 Limited Vocabulary and Word Choice

Another problem the participants encountered while writing for academic purposes was vocabulary. Three out of five interview respondents stated that they struggled with language. Reading fluency and text comprehension is dependent on the vocabulary knowledge of the student. According to Bryant et al. (2018), students with limited vocabulary usually do not learn the meanings of new words as quickly as those with a wider range of vocabulary. It aligns with Laflamme (2020), who notes that studies on vocabulary instruction clearly show that vocabulary knowledge is a key factor in determining reading ability. There is a gap often observed between the intended meaning and actual expression which is vital for communicating ideas clearly. Therefore, expanding students' vocabulary is necessary to improve their understanding of academic material and ability to express concepts precisely.

5.2.3 Paraphrasing and Linguistic Complexity

Paraphrasing remains a significant issue in academic writing according to the study findings. The participants with limited vocabulary knowledge shared that they struggled with paraphrasing while writing. Thao and Quynh (2020) claim that students struggle with paraphrasing as they lack understanding of the source material. As per the definition of Kasim and Raisha (2017), linguistic knowledge is the unconscious understanding of the linguistic system made up of words, sounds, structures, meanings, and rules. According to Rodman and Hyams (2003), insufficient vocabulary knowledge is another form of semantic difficulty. Linguistic complexity also involves inadequate knowledge about word classes and derivatives. Syntactical complexity also includes the lack of

proper sentence structure and grammar knowledge. In addition to this, Batane (2010) notes that this problem is worsened by a lack of academic writing abilities. The findings of this study show that, due to linguistic complexity and limited vocabulary knowledge, participants had difficulties paraphrasing information accurately. This ultimately results in a lack of scholarly tone, coherence, and variety in their writing.

5.2.4 Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

The difficulties students face with critical thinking which often show up as shallow analysis and arguments was constantly coming out in the findings. Wingate (2011) and Jones (2007) have expressed concerns about students' incapacity to thoroughly explore subjects and incorporate a variety of viewpoints in their writing. Interviews revealed that two out of five participants have trouble using reliable sources, reasoning logically, and making clear connections between concepts. These difficulties highlight how vital it is to develop critical thinking abilities in academic writing training.

5.2.5 Psychological Challenges and Motivation

Dealing with psychological obstacles was one of the barriers. To increase students' willingness to finish their work, motivation is one of the key components. However, lack of motivation has been recognized in the findings. The findings align with the study conducted by Gbollie & Keamu (2017) reported that students' academic performance can only be improved with motivation. All the participants in the study agreed on having feelings of anxiety at the beginning of their master's level when assigned with writing task which would lead them to think of dropping led to self-doubt and low confidence in their capacity to finish the masters' programme. Puspita (2019) had similar findings. Psychological factors, such as lack of confidence and fear of failure are common among postgraduate students particularly those conducting academic paper for the first time. Lestari (2020), also highlighted that students' who lack adequate research skills usually lack the confidence to continue their studies and additionally emphasised the significance of motivation in overcoming these anxieties.

Thus, the findings of the current study are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that psychological obstacles, such as low motivation, anxiety and fear of failure, have a major impact on students' capacity to produce excellent academic writing.

5.3 Thematic Analysis and Discussion on the Findings Related to RQ 2

5.3.1 Absence of Academic Writing Instruction at the Undergraduate Level

The second research question focused on examining whether discrepancies exist between National University and private university English teaching and writing expectations and how these might affect students' academic writing performance. In According to the participants' statements, collected through semi-structured interviews with students who completed their undergraduate studies in English at the National University, academic writing at the postgraduate level was completely new to them. At the bachelor's level, there was no course related to academic writing, they did not know how to conduct research, write a term paper, or prepare a thesis. Consequently, their writing quality was not strong. NU Graduate students may face numerous perplexing difficulties as a result of inadequate academic writing instruction. They had to put in significant effort to learn academic writing and improve their skills. Their statements reveal a clear gap in English teaching and writing expectations between the two systems.

Three out of five participants claimed that the gap in academic writing knowledge at their bachelor's level hindered their academic writing abilities, which resulted in a low CGPA at the beginning of their master's studies. The findings also echo Afrin's (2014) opinion that poor writing skills negatively impact students' overall grades. Participants also mentioned that at the bachelor level most of the time teachers were using Bangla as their medium of instruction, which is similar to the findings conducted by Farooqui (2012) as well as Rahman, Pandian, and Kaur's (2018) studies.

National university graduates highlighted that the academic writing requirements at the master's level at a private university are much higher than at their bachelor's level of study. In the absence of academic writing courses at their bachelor's level, students are unable to perform well at their

master's level. Moreover, this finding reveals a clear limitation between the two systems, which is initially accountable for students' lower academic performance at the master's level.

5.3.2 Impact of Teaching Gaps on Critical Thinking

An important point has been coming out from the data analysis, which is that National University's bachelor's-level curriculum was totally exam-orientated, and the questions were designed by following previous years' questions. Therefore, the dependency on memorising answers was formed in students' minds as they focused on getting acceptable marks in the exams, which limited their ability to think critically. They believed that memorisation helped them complete exams on time, whereas answering questions critically was more time-consuming. Their critical thinking skills remained undeveloped at their bachelor's level, which was a highly required skill at their master's level. This finding parallels Graham's (2019) study; it is crucial to teach students how to carry out critical writing processes, including planning and rewriting, as it is important for writing academic writing processes. Therefore, it is clear that an exam-oriented curriculum at the National University has negative effects on students' reliance on memorisation over analytical writing, restricts their ability to practise critical thinking and analytical writing, and leaves them unprepared for the more reflective and research-intensive writing requirements of master's programmes at private universities.

5.4 Thematic Analysis and Discussion on the Findings Related to RQ 3

5.4.1 Self-Management and Self-Directed Learning

The third research question aimed to demonstrate the strategies used by students to overcome the challenges they faced in academic writing at their master's level. Participants used various tactics or endeavors to get beyond the obstacles they faced in academic writing at their master's level. Self-management and self-directed learning techniques are identified as the initial tactic. According to Bakker (2017), self-management is a technique for controlling one's own conduct, assessing one's own performance, and disciplining oneself when criteria are not fulfilled. As mentioned, when an individual's personal standards are not met and are out of control, they engage

in self-management. In this context, Faria discussed her personal experiences in using YouTube, watching English movies, and memorizing vocabulary that helped her as self-directed learning tools. Additionally, this tactic helps in the development of her critical thinking abilities. Faria mentioned, “Listening to English conversations on YouTube and watching English movies ultimately helped improve my vocabulary knowledge and critical thinking skills.” I also started memorizing new vocabularies.” The finding aligns with Mehrabi et al.'s (2016) study, where self-regulated learning strategies were highlighted for overcoming obstacles. Such proactive behaviour exhibits that when formal writing instruction is limited, learners adapt self-directed techniques to improve their writing confidence.

5.4.2 Use of Technology

The second tactic employed by EFL students was the use of technology. The most common sub-theme is the usage of language apps; every participant reported using them at some time when writing for academic purposes. According to their statements, the participants reported that they used language apps like Grammarly to reduce the number of grammatical errors in their writing. They addressed that the app's features had improved their writing efficiency and offered them numerous benefits. Similarly, Lailika (2019) discovered that EFL students had favourable opinions and believed Grammarly was a helpful tool for checking their grammar, particularly in spelling and punctuation. Furthermore, Fitria (2021) found that using Grammarly improved writing performance. Thus, technological tools help to enhance students' grammatical accuracy as well as motivate them for self-correction and encourage an appreciation for their role in the writing process.

5.4.3 Reading as a Strategy for Academic Improvement

Another significant strategy mentioned by the participants is reading articles. By using this strategy participants were able to learn the academic writing styles. Not only that this tactic also helps them to enrich their vocabulary knowledge. Participants Samia and Anika discussed the value of reading articles in order to increase their vocabulary. Samia mentioned: “Reading different types of articles

helped me to improve my writing skills and expand my vocabulary.” Anika also stated that: “I started reading articles and newspapers on a daily basis to overcome the problem.” This finding supports Alfaki (2015) who emphasised the importance of well-written articles for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills.

5.4.4 Seeking Assistance and Feedback

The last strategy highlights how seeking assistance and feedback helps to improve students' academic writing expertise. All the participants noted that asking for assistance from others was another effective tactic. Getting assistance from supervisors is the most common thing related to this theme. Based on interviews that have been conducted, every participant affirmed that the feedback they received from their supervisor helped them a lot to understand the significant error in their writing, and at the same time, they were able to improve their academic writing skills. Samia shared, “I sought help from my classmates whenever I encountered something difficult to understand.” Faria also shared the same opinion; she also added, “I consistently tried to get feedback from my supervisor and also sought advice from seniors who had completed their academic papers before.” Sara (2019) found that peer and mentor support in academic writing can lead positive outcomes in academic writing which it aligned with other researchers. Ravichandran et al. (2017) indicated further those supervisors have a role in boosting students' confidence by giving timely feedback and sufficient support. For students struggling with academic writing, collaborative environment can be an aid and create opportunities.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 CONCLUSION

This study explored three research questions: (1) the academic writing challenges faced by National University students at the Master's level in private universities, (2) differences in English teaching and writing expectations between National University and private universities, and (3) strategies students employ to overcome these challenges.

The findings of this study indicated that academic writing at the master's level creates a number of difficulties for National university students. Based on the collected data, there were four distinct themes proven to present such as Linguistics and Writing Knowledge Gap, Lack of Critical Thinking Skills, Dealing with Psychological Difficulties, Inadequate Academic Writing Practices at the Bachelor's Level. The most prevalent and most mentioned issues based in the interview were grammar, vocabulary and gap of academic writing knowledge.

Additionally, it was found that National University students employed some strategies in minimizing those challenges, including strategies for overcoming challenges Self-Directed Learning, Technological Help, Reading Articles and Expanding Vocabulary, Seeking help and Feedback.

In the end, the significance of this study emphasises how essential it is to identify and address the challenges that National University students face in academic writing at the master's level. By incorporating comprehensive solutions across the educational spectrum, teachers and institutions can better prepare students for the critical thinking skill of competent term paper, academic paper or research paper, and thesis writing. This will ultimately improve their academic success in an ESOL environment, such as in Bangladesh.

6.2 RECOMMENDATION

Given the findings of the study, the researcher would like to provide a number of recommendations as follows:

1. The study urges policy makers in non-native English-speaking countries to bring a transformation in the national university curriculum by adding a research methodology course at the bachelor's level. This will enhance students' academic writing and critical thinking abilities while also advancing their understanding of how to write academically.
2. Learners are advised to asking for assistance from others; there are many skilled people who are eager to share their expertise. Make an effort to be more proactive and don't be afraid to ask for help. Never rule out the possibility that someone could assist if you find yourself in a standstill situation. Furthermore, it is clear that ESOL students were able to resolve many issues with academic writing by seeking assistance from others.
3. The last recommendation is to become a more self-reliant individual. While there are numerous approaches, the most efficient one is to continuously assess and grow from prior errors. By reflecting on yourself, you do your future selves a favor and remain clear of any problems that can arise. As a result, ESOL students will benefit from improved performance in foreign languages, particularly in academic writing. Doing constructive things would also be quite beneficial in allowing your psychological states some space, which would reduce the likelihood of experiencing mental exhaustion.

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Appendix A: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear participant,

My name is Yeasmin Haque. Currently, I am pursuing my master's degree in English and Humanities in a private university in Dhaka. My research title is "Exploring National University Students' Challenges of Academic Writing at the Masters Level". The main aim of this study is to explore whether National university students face challenges in academic writing at the master's level, and if they do, how they overcome those challenges. For being a part of the study, you must participate a one-hour interview session. Your interview will be recorded and only be used for the purpose of this study, and not be disclosed to anyone. In addition, I will be using pseudonyms for keeping your identity confidential.

If you would like to be a part of this study, please read the details given in the consent form on the next page and sign it. Your kind cooperation in conducting the study will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you

Yeasmin Haque

Phone No. +8801521304543

E-mail: yeasmineva29@gmail.com

Research Participation Consent Form

Please read the following statements and tick in the box.

1. I have read the description and understood the information given which describes what this study is about and data collection methods will be taken
2. My participation is voluntary and I feel free to withdraw at any time
3. I agree to take part in the interview sessions of the study
4. I agree to be video and audio taped for my voice and face
5. The researcher has my permission to contact me through the following phone number or email address for any clarification after the completion of data collection

Name.....

Signature.....

Date

Email address:

Phone No.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Research Questions

4. What types of academic writing challenges do National University students in Bangladesh face while studying at a private university at the Master's level?
5. Is there any difference in English teaching and writing expectations between National University and private university programs that might affect the students' academic performance?
6. How do they overcome the challenges of academic writing at the Master's Level?

In order to address the research issues of this study, the participants would be asked the following questions during the semi-structured interview sessions.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Interview Questions (IQs)	Background Information	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
1. Please share your school and college educational background. What was the geographical location and medium of instruction in your school and college?	✓			
2. Can you please tell why you chose English rather than other subjects at your Bachelor's level?	✓			
3. What was your experience studying for a bachelor's in English, and how would you describe your English language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening)?	✓			
4. Why did you choose to complete your master's degree at a private university rather than at a national university?	✓			
5. Did you enjoy studying English during your academic journey? Please explain why or why not.	✓			

6. What was your first impression of academic writing after enrolling in private university's Master's program?		✓		
7. Did you find any difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, or structure when writing academically at the Master's level?		✓		
8. Do you have trouble figuring out how to begin and structure an academic paper, including the introduction, body, and conclusion and dealing with issues like avoiding plagiarism, summarizing or paraphrasing?		✓		
9. Do you feel comfortable writing critically about your own thoughts? If not, then why?		✓		
10. Could you please describe how English was taught at National University?			✓	
11. Have you written assignments, theses, or other academic papers before?			✓	
12. Do you face any specific challenges as a result of the differences between your present and former learning environments?			✓	
13. Were you encouraged to think critically and express your own ideas in writing during your undergraduate studies?			✓	
14. Did you feel that writing tasks at the Master's level were harder than at the undergraduate level?			✓	
15. When you faced a problem with academic writing, what was the first thing you usually did?				✓

16. Were your teachers or supervisors helpful in improving your academic writing at the Masters Level?				✓
17. What strategies and resources did you personally use to overcome the challenges you faced in your academic writing (e.g., manage time, reduce stress, workshops, study groups, or online resources)?				✓
18. Based on your experience, what would you recommend to future students to overcome the challenges you faced?				✓
19. Do you think there is anything that should be added to the National University curriculum to improve students' academic writing				✓

Appendix C: Example of a Transcription of One Participant's Interview session

DU	Participants	Questions and Answers
01	I	I appreciate you for being taken part in the interview session. I am starting with your school and college background. Can you tell me what was your school and college's geographical location in Bangladesh? What was the medium of instruction in there?
02	Samia	Welcome. I am happy to be a part of it. [Laughs] My school college was in Bogura. Which in Rajshahi. I completed my school and college both from there and I was in Bangla Medium.
03	I	Can you please tell why you chose English rather than other subjects at your Bachelor's level?
04	Samia	Aaaaa...because, when I was in college or school English used to be one of my favourite subjects. So, I thought if I could not go for medical then I will go for English. I used to love that language because I used to see a lot of cartoons at that time.
05	I	What was your experience studying for a bachelor's in English, and how would you describe your English language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening)?
06	Samia	My experience studying bachelor's in English was very good. I didn't expect that I will just study some poems and stories. I expected that we will study different kinds of grammar or something. But when I started, I understood that studying English doesn't mean studying that grammar. It

		means that studying the literature. So, it was very fun. I enjoyed a lot. And I would say my language skill, reading, writing was good. I love to write. I would say I have a bit of lacking in reading. Maybe I get panicked while reading in front of everybody sometimes. Listening and speaking was, I was fluent in speaking and I was good in listening as well. As I said, I used to watch a lot of cartoons in my childhood, that's why maybe.
07	I	Why did you choose to complete your master's degree at a private university rather than at a national university?
08	Samia	When I started my undergrad, I had something in mind that maybe studying in a private university is a waste of money. Studying in a private university and studying in a national university are the same. But when I started it, after some years, I understood that studying in a private university and national university is very different. Like we didn't practice a lot of things in our undergrad in national university. It was something that is lacking behind. Like we didn't do any research paper, we hadn't any presentation. We were just studying and at the end of the year, we were just giving exams. And in our national university, there was no master's in ELT, where I had love for teaching. I thought that if I go for teaching in school or colleges, I have to have a good knowledge of ELT. So that's why I thought that I will complete my master's from a private university under ELT major, not from literature or science.
09	I	Did you enjoy studying English during your academic journey? Please explain why or why not.
10	Samia	Yes, I enjoyed a lot studying English in my academic journey. Because as I said, I didn't expect that we will study different kinds of literature, different kinds of stories, fiction, non-fiction. They are fun. Like whatever the other people are studying or reading for fun or leisure time, you are just studying that for your academic work. So that is a good part.
11	I	What was your first impression of academic writing after enrolling in a private university's master's program?
12	Samia	It was horrible. When I was in master's, in the interview, the teacher asked that, do you know that "X" University believes in research? So, it's a mandatory work for you. So, I didn't understand even. I just said that whatever the university needs, we will do for that. But when the first courses come to academic writing or paper, I literally had any idea how to write a research paper because we didn't have any research or teacher's work in our undergraduate level. It was horrifying. I was like, what should I say? I was afraid. Still now I'm afraid of writing papers. But I was scared that most of the students who are from universities like public or private universities, they know how to write academic papers from their undergraduates. Where we are in master's, we don't know anything. So, the teacher's expectations were high. But probably we would know a lot of things. And we didn't know anything about writing a paper. So that was a horrible experience.

13	I	Did you find any difficulties with vocabulary, grammar or structure when writing academically at the master's level?
14	Samia	Not the vocabulary, but the grammar, I have few grammatical problems with tenses and prepositions. And also, the structure of academic writing was difficult for me.
15	I	Okay. Do you have trouble figuring out how to begin or structure an academic paper, including the interaction, body and conclusion, and dealing with issues like avoiding plagiarism, summarizing or paraphrasing?
16	Samia	Yes, I had a lot of issues regarding this. Like how to format things, how to give structure to a paper. And whenever I'm getting help from somewhere, like in my first paper, Miss noticed that there was 80% plagiarism, where I didn't understand that we could not copy something from there. Like I am writing the thing from that paper. I'm giving, what would I say, reference to that paper, but still, it's under plagiarism. Then Miss said that, yes, if you are giving reference, still you have to change the thing. You can write the full thing, full sentences, after sentences, copy a full paragraph like this. You have to write it newly, then you have to be ready. So, I was confused. I was afraid. And yes, I had a lot of issues.
17	I	Do you feel comfortable writing critically about your own thoughts? If not, then why?
18	Samia	Yes, I feel comfortable in writing critical things in my own thoughts. But what I found out that in academic paper, we are not allowed to write that much from our own thoughts. Like you have to prove everything. You have to give reference to everything. So, whatever you are thinking, you have to find the similar thoughts from someone who has already proven it. So that's the hard part. I am comfortable in writing my own thoughts, but I don't think that it helps a lot in academic paper. It doesn't help that much.
19	I	Could you please describe how English was taught at National University?
20	Samia	In National University, as I am from Bangla medium background, it was similar to my school and colleges. Like the way we used to study our English first paper, I think in English honours level, we studied in the same method. Like we are studying, sometimes we are translating, sometimes we are just giving question and answer from there. It was similar to our school and colleges. National level curriculum is a bit different from our private university because there is no presentation. Only you are studying the whole year and then after the year you are giving exam. As "X" College is a bit modified

		from the other National University, I think the teacher tries their best to give us more than other National University. But still, as the curriculum is same, it is taught in the same manner.
21	I	Was the testing and evaluation process the same at all levels of your bachelor's program?
22	Samia	Yes
23	I	There was no difference?
24	Samia	No, there was no difference. If you study, you memorize, then you write.
25	I	Have you written assignments, thesis or other academic papers before? Have you already thought about this?
26	Samia	In my undergrad, I didn't do any, but in masters, when we started, different courses we had to complete academic papers or term papers for each course.
27	I	Do you face any specific challenges as a result of the differences between your present and former learning environments?
28	Samia	There were a lot of problems in the learning environment. The main difference was that in private universities; the overall medium of instruction is in English. But the colleges under the National University do not follow EMI. So, when I came to a private university, the whole environment changed. So, I had to face many challenges in coping with the new environment.
29	I	Were you encouraged to think critically and express your own ideas in writing during your undergraduate studies?
30	Samia	Yes, as we are literature background students, in literature, we have to elaborate a lot. We have to write a lot. There were four hours of written exam. We had a lot of questions and the marks actually carried from how well you can elaborate. So yes, you have to write a lot of things from your own understanding. Sometimes it was not possible to read all of the books line by line and then you will just write that it was not possible. So, the marks only carried from how you understand the thing and then how well you can elaborate that. So we were encouraged.
31	I	Did you feel that writing tasks at the Master's level were harder than at the undergraduate level?
32	Samia	Ummm. It was harder in a sense that it is different in structure. Writing papers and writing question answers are not the same. You have to be aware of different kind of structure, different kind of style like MLA style and APA style. Aaaa, the whole structure writing process is different so I would not say it was too much harder but it was a totally different experience.
33	I	When you faced a problem with academic writing, what was the first thing you usually did?
34	Samia	Aaaaa, I usually talked with my friends who came from national university. We were five friends, most probably we met in our 1 st

		semester and I was new few of them were new but two of them were in X university one year before than me, so faced the challenges and they overcame it by understanding and they helped me in understanding.
35	I	Were your teachers or supervisors helpful in improving your academic writing at the Masters Level?
36	Samia	Yes, they were so much helpful.
37	I	What strategies and resources did you personally use to overcome the challenges you faced in your academic writing (e.g., manage time, reduce stress, workshops, study groups, or online resources)?
38	Samia	Aaaa, time management didn't help me so much. But I studied in groups with my friend and online resources helped me a lot and also in YouTube there are so many channels now, who are providing guidance like how to write research paper and everything like that. Additionally, I read too many articles those helped me a lot to overcome those challenges.
39	I	Based on your experience, what would you recommend to future students to overcome the challenges you faced?
40	Samia	As I was a student who literally had any idea of academic papers, I would suggest the future students that before coming to a private university, as I said already that there are a lot of online resources on writing papers, they can take help from there. So they have to get prepared for writing papers, they should get some basic ideas so that when they come to university, for the first time when they start writing, they don't get shocked like us, they don't get afraid like us. It's not a difficult thing, it's just new so they need to go to different papers, how to write and I think they can take help from the online resources to get prepared themselves for the coming challenges.
41	I	Do you think there is anything that should be added to the National University curriculum to improve students' academic writing?
42	Samia	Yes, they should include academic paper writing and presentation on the National University curriculum.
43	I	Thank you for your precious time, dear. We are ending this interview session.