

Current Issues And Challenges For Non-Native English Speakers In Academic Writing

Karshieva Sarvinoz Ural qizi

MA TESOL, Webster University in Tashkent, PhD Applicant in English Language Teaching Methodology, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article examines the multifaceted challenges faced by non-native English speakers (NNES) in academic writing, with a special focus on the higher education context in Uzbekistan. Academic writing, as one of the most important components of modern research and scholarship, requires not only linguistic accuracy but also a deep understanding of rhetorical, cultural, and disciplinary conventions. NNES students often experience linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary, misuse of cohesive devices, and frequent grammatical errors. Furthermore, rhetorical and cultural disparities complicate their adaptation, since English academic discourse emphasizes linearity, clarity, and critical argumentation, which may differ significantly from their first language traditions. Psychological obstacles, including writing anxiety, fear of criticism, and lack of confidence, also negatively affect productivity. Institutional factors, such as the absence of academic writing centers, insufficient access to international databases, and lack of trained faculty, further exacerbate the problem. The article reviews recent international and local studies and argues that integrated support programs, scaffolded writing instruction across curricula, and culturally responsive pedagogy are essential in addressing these issues. In addition, the use of digital technologies, peer collaboration, and writing workshops can contribute to improved performance. Overall, the paper concludes that comprehensive, inclusive, and innovative approaches are necessary to help NNES students fully participate in global academic discourse.

Keywords: Academic writing, NNES, linguistic barriers, pedagogy, cultural differences.

Introduction: Academic writing has become an essential component of higher education worldwide and is widely recognized as a fundamental skill for both academic and professional success. The ability to communicate complex ideas in a clear, coherent, and persuasive manner is no longer confined to native speakers of English but has become a global expectation. In today's globalized academic community, English dominates as the primary language of research, international conferences, and scholarly publications, creating both opportunities and challenges for learners around the world. This dominance facilitates cross-cultural communication and enables the exchange of knowledge across borders; however, it simultaneously presents significant difficulties for non-native English speakers (NNES), who must navigate linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, and psychological barriers in order to participate effectively in the academic sphere (Hyland,

2016).

For NNES learners, linguistic barriers often constitute the first and most immediate challenge. Many students face difficulties with limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical inaccuracies, and lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic style. Academic writing in English requires precision, accuracy, and adherence to specific structural norms, which may differ substantially from the writing practices in learners' first languages. Beyond language mechanics, rhetorical and cultural differences further complicate the writing process. Whereas English academic writing typically emphasizes clarity, explicit argumentation, logical coherence, and linear organization, students from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds may have been socialized into traditions that value indirectness, memorization, or implicit reasoning. Such discrepancies can result in mismatches between students' writing and the expectations of English-

language journals or instructors, which may, in turn, affect evaluation outcomes and students' confidence.

Psychological challenges also play a crucial role in shaping NNES students' academic writing experiences. Writing anxiety, fear of failure, and low self-efficacy can inhibit students from fully expressing their ideas and developing their unique academic voice. Research has shown that these affective factors often exacerbate the difficulties posed by linguistic and cultural barriers, resulting in a cycle of frustration and avoidance (Gorjian et al., 2012). Consequently, NNES learners may struggle not only to meet formal academic standards but also to engage in higher-order writing processes such as critical thinking, synthesis, and argumentation.

In Uzbekistan, these challenges are particularly salient. In recent years, the pressure to publish in English-medium journals has increased significantly, especially for graduate students, early-career researchers, and faculty members aiming to participate in the international academic community (Qodirova, 2021). Despite this growing demand, many students lack sufficient exposure to authentic academic texts, have limited access to international journals, and encounter difficulties with essential skills such as paraphrasing, summarizing, critical analysis, and proper citation practices. These obstacles often lead to frustration, unintended plagiarism, or avoidance of academic writing tasks altogether, hindering both personal development and scholarly productivity.

Given these circumstances, it is imperative to investigate the specific challenges faced by NNES learners in Uzbekistan, while drawing on international research to identify evidence-based strategies for support. This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of these challenges and to propose practical solutions that can enhance students' academic writing competencies. Among the suggested interventions are the integration of systematic academic writing instruction across university curricula, the establishment of writing support centers, and the adoption of culturally responsive pedagogical approaches.

By addressing the linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, and psychological needs of NNES learners, educators can help students build confidence, develop critical writing skills, and engage more effectively in global academic discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on NNES academic writing has grown significantly in recent decades. Kaplan (1966) first introduced the concept of cultural thought patterns, showing that rhetorical traditions differ across languages. For example, while English tends to favor

linear argumentation, some other traditions prefer circular or indirect reasoning. This early observation laid the foundation for understanding how cultural backgrounds influence academic writing.

Building on this, Swales and Feak (2012) highlight the importance of genre awareness in helping NNES adapt to international academic conventions. They argue that explicit instruction in genres such as research articles, literature reviews, and conference papers allows students to internalize the rhetorical moves required for successful participation in global discourse.

Hyland (2016) expands this perspective by emphasizing the role of power and inequality in academic publishing. He points out that English-language dominance not only creates opportunities for wider communication but also reinforces disparities between native and non-native speakers, as NNES scholars often struggle to publish in high-impact journals. Hyland further stresses that pedagogy should empower NNES students to see themselves as legitimate contributors rather than outsiders.

In addition to linguistic and cultural issues, Leki (2007) underlines the psychological dimension of NNES writing, noting that many students experience fear of failure, lack of confidence, and writing anxiety. Such factors often hinder productivity and discourage students from submitting their work to international outlets. Similarly, Canagarajah (2002) discusses the geopolitics of academic writing, showing how institutional hierarchies and unequal access to resources disadvantage NNES scholars in the global academic community.

Another significant line of research focuses on integrating academic writing into subject-specific learning. Wingate (2012) argues that writing instruction should not be treated as a generic skill taught in isolation but rather embedded across disciplines. This approach helps students develop disciplinary literacy and understand the conventions specific to their fields.

Regional studies in Central Asia also provide valuable insights. Qodirova (2021) identifies weak citation and paraphrasing skills among Uzbek university students, which reflects a broader lack of exposure to international standards of academic writing. Similarly, Makhmudova (2023) highlights the effectiveness of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in enhancing students' academic literacy, noting that integrative approaches encourage learners to practice writing in authentic subject contexts.

Recent international works confirm similar trends. Alsariera and Yunus (2024) report that plagiarism and limited academic vocabulary remain persistent issues

among NNES writers. Tiwari (2023) adds that technological support, such as plagiarism detection software and writing platforms, can significantly reduce these challenges if used systematically.

Finally, Shakirov (2023) emphasizes the importance of digital corpora and authentic models in improving academic writing. His study demonstrates that when NNES students are exposed to real research texts, they gain a better understanding of genre conventions and are able to transfer this knowledge into their own writing.

Taken together, these studies suggest that NNES challenges are multidimensional, encompassing linguistic, cultural, psychological, and institutional dimensions. They also indicate that effective solutions must combine pedagogical innovations, institutional support, and access to international academic resources.

Challenges Faced by NNES

1. Linguistic Barriers

One of the most immediate and persistent difficulties for non-native English speakers (NNES) lies in linguistic limitations. Limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical errors, and the misuse of cohesive devices often result in unclear and awkwardly structured writing (Shakirov, 2023). Academic writing, unlike general communication, requires the use of discipline-specific terminology, accurate paraphrasing skills, and stylistic precision. Students who lack sufficient exposure to academic discourse tend to struggle with selecting the most appropriate lexical choices, which leads to vague or imprecise expressions. Furthermore, paraphrasing and summarizing — essential techniques for avoiding plagiarism — demand a high level of language awareness and syntactic flexibility. Many NNES learners rely heavily on literal translations from their first language, which results in unnatural phrasing, disrupted flow, and interference from their mother tongue structures (Hyland, 2016). These issues are compounded when students attempt to engage with advanced scholarly texts, where complex grammatical constructions and specialized vocabulary are prevalent. As a result, linguistic barriers not only hinder students' ability to produce high-quality academic work but also affect their confidence and willingness to write extensively in English.

2. Cultural and Rhetorical Differences

Academic writing is not a culturally neutral practice but one that reflects deeply embedded rhetorical traditions. Kaplan (1966) famously demonstrated how cultural thought patterns influence organizational preferences in writing. For instance, English academic

writing tends to prioritize clarity, explicit argumentation, and linear development of ideas, whereas in other cultures, rhetorical practices may place greater value on indirectness, circular reasoning, or reliance on shared cultural knowledge. For NNES students, this mismatch can be particularly challenging, as their writing may appear "illogical" or "disorganized" to instructors or reviewers who expect Anglo-American rhetorical norms. Moreover, when these students attempt to publish internationally, they may face rejection not due to the lack of original ideas but because of unfamiliarity with the conventions of English-language academic discourse (Alsariera & Yunus, 2024). The shift from one rhetorical tradition to another is not simply a matter of learning new rules; it involves a process of acculturation into a different epistemological worldview. Consequently, NNES learners must develop intercultural awareness and adapt their rhetorical strategies to align with global standards while still preserving their own academic voice. This balancing act is often a source of significant difficulty and frustration.

3. Psychological Barriers

In addition to linguistic and cultural challenges, psychological barriers play a crucial role in shaping the academic writing experiences of NNES learners. Writing anxiety, fear of criticism, and low self-confidence are commonly reported obstacles that reduce students' productivity and willingness to write. Leki (2007) points out that many second-language writers view errors not as natural steps in the learning process but as personal failures, which heightens their reluctance to engage in extended writing tasks. This negative mindset often results in procrastination, avoidance of writing assignments, or overreliance on rote memorization instead of critical thinking and original expression. Furthermore, the high-stakes nature of academic writing — where grades, scholarships, or publication opportunities may depend on the quality of the text — amplifies stress levels and exacerbates anxiety. Fear of peer or instructor judgment can also silence students' academic voice, preventing them from expressing innovative ideas with confidence. Over time, these psychological constraints may lead to a cycle of frustration in which students produce less, receive negative feedback, and consequently lose further motivation to improve. Without proper psychological support and confidence-building pedagogies, NNES learners may remain trapped in this cycle, undermining their long-term academic growth.

4. Institutional Factors

Finally, the institutional context in which NNES learners

develop their writing skills plays a decisive role in either supporting or hindering their academic progress. Many higher education institutions, particularly in developing countries, lack specialized writing centers, sufficient resources, and adequately trained staff to provide systematic academic writing instruction (Canagarajah, 2002). In some cases, writing instruction is treated as an ancillary skill rather than a core component of the curriculum, leaving students underprepared for the demands of research and scholarly publication. Furthermore, limited access to international journals and digital libraries restricts students' exposure to authentic academic texts, thereby narrowing their understanding of disciplinary conventions and citation practices. Instructors themselves may lack professional development opportunities in academic writing pedagogy, which results in inconsistent or outdated approaches to teaching. Institutional barriers also manifest in assessment systems that prioritize rote memorization over critical thinking and original writing, leaving students ill-equipped for academic discourse in global contexts. Without structural reforms — such as integrating academic writing courses into all levels of higher education, providing resources for continuous practice, and fostering a culture of research and publication — NNES learners will continue to face significant institutional obstacles that constrain their academic writing development.

Solutions and Pedagogical Approaches

1. Academic Writing Support Centers

Establishing academic writing support centers within universities is increasingly recognized as one of the most effective solutions for addressing the challenges faced by NNES students. As Hyland (2016) notes, writing support should not be limited to surface-level correction of grammar or spelling but should aim to develop students' ability to participate in disciplinary discourse. A well-structured writing center can therefore provide multiple tailored services such as peer-review workshops, one-on-one consultations, seminars on citation practices, and discipline-specific training sessions. Such centers not only help students understand how to organize arguments and build logical coherence but also create a culture of continuous improvement in writing.

Wingate (2012) emphasizes that writing instruction works best when integrated with subject-specific learning, as students are more likely to retain skills when they practice them in authentic contexts. Writing centers can, therefore, collaborate with academic departments to design targeted workshops, for instance, on writing lab reports for science students or literature reviews for humanities students. In addition,

Leki (2007) highlights that writing centers can also address psychological barriers such as writing anxiety, since students who receive supportive and constructive feedback are more motivated to revise and improve.

Furthermore, international studies show that students who actively participate in writing centers not only demonstrate stronger confidence and improved writing competence but also achieve better outcomes in research projects and publications (Tiwari, 2023). Writing centers thus become spaces where students practice both the technical and affective dimensions of writing — developing academic accuracy while simultaneously overcoming fear of failure.

2. Curriculum Integration

Another critical solution is embedding academic writing into the curriculum rather than treating it as an optional or supplementary course. Wingate (2012) strongly argues that writing is not a generic skill but is always context-specific and tied to disciplinary practices. For example, science students need to master the conventions of lab reports and research articles, while students in social sciences must practice case studies, critical reviews, and empirical research papers. By embedding writing instruction into subject courses, students are exposed to authentic models and learn how to adapt their style to different academic communities.

Hyland (2016) also emphasizes that academic literacy is situated within communities of practice. This means that writing instruction should reflect the actual discourse and expectations of each field rather than relying on abstract or generalized exercises. To ensure this, writing assignments should be scaffolded across the years of study. First-year students might start with reflective journals and short summaries, while senior students should progress to literature reviews, data analysis, and full-length theses.

According to Leki (2007), scaffolding is essential to avoid overwhelming students, since large and complex tasks can lead to discouragement if learners are not gradually prepared. Interdepartmental collaboration is also crucial, as inconsistent approaches across faculties can confuse students. For instance, if one department requires APA while another demands Chicago referencing without adequate training, learners may become frustrated (Tiwari, 2023). Thus, curriculum integration ensures coherence, authenticity, and fairness in academic writing instruction.

3. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a vital dimension of effective academic writing instruction for NNES students. Kaplan's (1966) early research showed that

cultural thought patterns strongly shape writing structures, with some traditions valuing circular reasoning, parallelism, or implicitness, while English academic writing emphasizes clarity, linearity, and explicit argumentation. If teachers disregard these differences, NNES students may feel that their intellectual traditions are devalued.

Instead, instructors should validate students' cultural and rhetorical backgrounds while guiding them toward international academic norms. Hyland (2016) stresses that writing reflects broader institutional and cultural practices, meaning that pedagogy must connect students' prior experiences with the expectations of global academic communities. Teachers can encourage students to analyze rhetorical models in both their first language and English, discussing similarities and differences. Such comparative exercises develop intercultural awareness and help students consciously adjust their style without feeling that they are abandoning their identities.

Canagarajah (2002) also argues that culturally responsive teaching promotes inclusivity and empowers students to negotiate multiple rhetorical traditions. For instance, rather than forcing students to immediately adopt Anglo-American conventions, educators can design gradual adaptation tasks that foster critical reflection. As Leki (2007) points out, when students feel respected and understood, their writing anxiety decreases, making them more open to adopting new conventions. Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy both improves writing skills and builds students' confidence and sense of belonging.

4. Collaborative Writing and Peer Feedback

Collaborative writing and structured peer-feedback activities are effective strategies for supporting NNES learners. Leki (2007) explains that peer interactions create opportunities for students to notice errors, share strategies, and learn from each other in a supportive environment. This not only reduces writing anxiety but also fosters a sense of community.

Hyland (2016) further notes that writing is inherently a socially situated practice, as academic discourse communities rely heavily on collaboration, co-authorship, and peer review. By involving students in group projects, peer assessments, and joint writing tasks, educators simulate the authentic processes of academic publishing. Such practices help students learn to critique others' work respectfully and integrate constructive feedback into their own drafts.

Swales and Feak (2012) stress that peer-review exercises enhance students' genre awareness by exposing them to diverse approaches and styles. Moreover, collaborative writing increases

accountability, since students must balance individual responsibility with group outcomes (Wingate, 2012). Tiwari (2023) adds that peer support mechanisms are particularly effective for NNES students because they lower the affective filter — making learners less fearful of mistakes and more willing to experiment with language. In this way, collaborative writing not only improves technical accuracy but also encourages critical thinking, creativity, and confidence in academic expression.

5. Use of Technology and Digital Tools

In the modern academic environment, technology is an indispensable tool for supporting NNES students in developing their writing skills. Hyland (2016) emphasizes that access to digital resources such as online databases, corpora, and academic journals is critical, as it allows students to analyze authentic texts in their field and emulate disciplinary discourse.

Swales and Feak (2012) highlight the effectiveness of corpus-based learning tools, which enable students to observe patterns of vocabulary use, collocations, and genre-specific structures. This exposure helps learners expand their academic vocabulary and develop genre awareness. Wingate (2012) also notes that online platforms such as Google Docs, Moodle, or MS Teams facilitate collaborative writing and real-time feedback, bridging the gap between in-class learning and independent study.

Digital tools further support autonomous learning. Leki (2007) observes that many NNES learners experience isolation in their writing process, but online writing labs (OWLs), grammar checkers, and citation software provide continuous support outside the classroom. Tiwari (2023) points out that applications such as Grammarly, Turnitin, and reference management systems (e.g., Zotero, Mendeley) not only correct surface-level mistakes but also reduce plagiarism and improve citation accuracy.

Finally, Canagarajah (2002) reminds us that technology is also an equity issue: universities must ensure that NNES students from resource-limited contexts have access to the same digital opportunities as their peers. Without such access, global participation in academic communication remains unequal. Thus, technology, when used thoughtfully, serves as both a pedagogical aid and a tool of empowerment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evidence from various international contexts demonstrates that NNES students who receive systematic and sustained academic writing support show remarkable improvements both linguistically and academically. Wingate (2012) argues that when writing

instruction is integrated into subject-specific courses, students not only acquire technical skills but also develop a deeper understanding of disciplinary discourse. This is because writing is not a neutral activity; it is an epistemic process through which knowledge is created, negotiated, and communicated. When students are encouraged to practice writing within their own disciplines — such as laboratory reports in science or literature reviews in humanities — they become active participants in their fields rather than passive language learners. Empirical studies in Europe, the United States, and Asia confirm that embedding writing across the curriculum increases engagement, critical thinking, and the ability to apply disciplinary conventions effectively.

In the case of Uzbekistan, initial pilot projects introducing academic writing courses at selected universities have shown promising outcomes. Students who participated in these programs reported higher levels of confidence when presenting their ideas both orally and in writing. They also gained greater awareness of plagiarism, citation rules, and ethical scholarship, which reduced incidences of unintentional academic misconduct. Moreover, these students demonstrated noticeable improvements in structuring essays, literature reviews, and research papers. The ability to formulate a clear thesis, organize supporting arguments, and conclude effectively was identified as a major achievement of the program. However, despite these encouraging results, such initiatives remain limited in scope. Only a small number of institutions currently offer well-structured academic writing courses, and in many cases, the courses are optional rather than mandatory. Consequently, a large proportion of students still graduate without sufficient training in academic writing.

Another important finding concerns the evaluation systems currently employed in higher education institutions. In many cases, instructors focus disproportionately on surface-level language features such as grammar, spelling, and vocabulary usage. While these elements are undeniably important, overemphasis on correctness often comes at the expense of higher-order concerns such as argumentation quality, critical analysis, originality, and coherence. This narrow approach to assessment may inadvertently discourage students from taking intellectual risks and developing their own academic voice. Instead, they may become overly cautious, producing formulaic texts that meet grammatical standards but lack depth and innovation. To overcome this, assessment rubrics need to evolve toward more holistic criteria, where content quality, critical engagement with sources, and logical organization are

valued alongside language accuracy.

The discussion also reveals that psychological barriers remain a persistent issue, even when structural support is provided. Some students continue to experience writing anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of confidence in their ability to meet academic standards. Leki (2007) and Gorjian et al. (2012) highlight that unless the affective dimension of writing is addressed, technical instruction alone cannot guarantee long-term success. In Uzbekistan, surveys suggest that students often feel intimidated by the perceived “rigidity” of academic writing conventions. However, participants in pilot writing courses reported that supportive environments, peer-review sessions, and constructive teacher feedback significantly reduced their anxiety levels. These findings confirm the importance of integrating motivational and psychological support mechanisms into writing programs, not only focusing on technical competence.

Finally, the results underscore the need for systemic reform. Academic writing support cannot be treated as a temporary project or the responsibility of individual instructors. Instead, it must be institutionalized as part of the broader educational strategy. Writing centers, continuous professional development for faculty, access to international journals, and the use of technology (e.g., plagiarism detection software, digital writing platforms) should become standard features of higher education in Uzbekistan. As Canagarajah (2002) reminds us, academic writing is inseparable from power relations in global knowledge production. If Uzbek students and scholars are to participate effectively in international academic discourse, they need equal access to resources, guidance, and opportunities.

In summary, while pilot initiatives and early reforms have demonstrated positive impacts on students’ skills and attitudes toward academic writing in Uzbekistan, much remains to be done. Widespread curriculum integration, reformed evaluation systems, and stronger institutional support are required to ensure that NNES students not only overcome linguistic challenges but also emerge as confident, independent contributors to global scholarly communities.

CONCLUSION

Academic writing extends far beyond the mastery of grammar and vocabulary; it represents a complex social, cultural, and cognitive practice that requires students to negotiate multiple forms of knowledge simultaneously. For NNES students, the challenges are multidimensional. They must not only learn to express themselves accurately in English but also adapt to rhetorical traditions that may be unfamiliar, manage

the psychological pressures of performance and evaluation, and cope with institutional barriers that often limit access to adequate resources. These findings confirm that linguistic difficulties are only the visible layer of a much deeper and more intricate set of obstacles.

The novelty of this article lies in its holistic approach to the issue of NNES academic writing, with particular attention to the context of Uzbekistan. While many previous studies have examined isolated aspects of the problem — such as grammar errors, plagiarism, or cultural differences — this paper highlights the interplay of linguistic, rhetorical, psychological, and institutional factors. By situating Uzbekistan's higher education reforms within the broader international discourse, the study underscores both the progress made and the persistent gaps that need to be addressed. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how global academic standards intersect with local educational realities.

Practical recommendations emerging from this discussion include the urgent need to establish writing centers within universities. Such centers would not only provide technical guidance but also create safe and supportive spaces where students can experiment, receive feedback, and gradually build confidence. Moreover, integrating writing across the curriculum ensures that writing is not perceived as an isolated skill but as an essential part of knowledge production in every discipline. Culturally responsive teaching methods should also be emphasized, recognizing that students bring diverse rhetorical traditions and intellectual backgrounds that can enrich rather than hinder the academic community. Finally, the use of digital tools — such as plagiarism detection software, online peer-review platforms, and academic writing applications — can significantly enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of writing instruction.

Looking ahead, the successful implementation of these measures has the potential to transform the academic landscape of Uzbekistan and similar contexts. By providing sustained institutional support, universities can move beyond surface-level language training and foster deeper intellectual engagement. NNES students, once hindered by anxiety and limited exposure, can evolve into confident and independent contributors to international scholarly communication. In the long term, such reforms will not only empower individual learners but also strengthen the global visibility and credibility of local research communities. Ultimately, building a culture of academic writing excellence is a collective responsibility — one that requires collaboration among educators, policymakers, and students themselves. If approached strategically and

inclusively, Uzbekistan can emerge as a regional leader in fostering academic writing competence, serving as a model for other countries navigating similar challenges.

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