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MANAGEMENT**

**Foundation Program Students' Writing: Issues, Contributing Factors,
and Suggestions**

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

We have read ADA's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this paper entitled **Foundation Program Students' Writing: Issues, Contributing Factors, and Suggestions** is all our own work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

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Abstract

Students encounter several issues in writing related to grammar, vocabulary, developing and organising ideas. Identifying their problems may accelerate the learning of students. However, there is no research in Azerbaijani context. Therefore, this qualitative study aimed to investigate Foundation year students' writing by exploring issues concerning them, factors contributing to the issues arising, and suggestions that may improve learning and teaching of writing.

The sample consisted of eighteen participants: nine foundation-year students and nine instructors teaching writing in the Foundation program. Data from instructors was collected through semi-structured interviews, while students participated in focus group interviews. Although all semi-structured interviews were in-person, one of the two focus-group interviews was held online. The findings of this study overlapped with reviewed literature. The majority of issues included lack of ideas, organisation, vocabulary and grammar, and time management; results indicated that school education or unsatisfactory background, lack of reading and motivation, and poor time management were contributing factors, according to interviewees' responses. The study revealed that frequent feedback, intensive reading tasks and instructor encouragement may have positively impacted foundation students' writing. Based on the findings we developed a workshop plan to address the retake students' challenges by providing them with techniques for brainstorming ideas and providing peer feedback.

Keywords: English language, writing skills, foundation program, concerning issues, contributing factors

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The language teaching and learning process includes four skills: receptive skills, listening and reading, and productive skills, writing and speaking (Harmer, 2014). All four skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) are essential in language learning; however, writing is considered more important in academic disciplines since it demonstrates the knowledge and expertise of students in their respective fields of study. The writing skill differs in forms, from formal or academic to informal. People can convey their ideas and feelings and convince others through their writings (Alfaki, 2015). Instructors easily examine their students' progress and academic development with their writings (Javid & Umer, 2014, as cited in Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). Writing is a tool to transmit ideas from the addresser to the addressee (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016), and accurate transmission of ideas and information requires appropriate writing skills (Hashim, 2011). Considering the complex nature of writing, it becomes challenging even for native language users to successfully express their ideas and opinions in a written form (Samaranayake, 2017).

Students need to master language skills because the subjects in their content areas are taught in English. In such cases, learning English helps the students deal with their academic demands and perform successfully in their disciplines and professional contexts (Adams & Keene, 2000, as cited in-Khasawneh, 2010). Many universities around the world offer Foundation programs to address this issue. The Foundation program is a pre-university program that enables students to adjust to their host country, improve their foreign language skills, and acquire additional academic skills. This program can be subject-oriented such as foundation programmes in Business, Computer Science, Humanities, and Arts, or may only focus on improving language skills (Pop, n.d).

The mission of the Foundation program is to develop students' linguistic, social, and academic skills. Moreover, this program helps learners to make a successful transition from school to higher education and university life and develops students' English language skills that assist them in pursuing an undergraduate degree in English (ADA University (n.d.); Baku Higher Oil School (n.d.); The University of Law (n.d.); Oman College of Management & Technology (n.d.)).

1.1. Statement of the problem

The transition from school to university is an overwhelming process that requires learners to be ready for the demands of university-level study (Conley, 2008, as cited in Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014). One of the transitional challenges of students is to adapt to the change in the medium of instruction (Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Azerbaijani students usually study in Azerbaijani or Russian mainstream schools. However, some universities offer undergraduate programs in the English language, and require students to possess English language skills to pursue their education in those programs (Ministry of Science and Education, n.d.).

Furthermore, foreign language learners (EFL students) struggle with several writing issues, including proper grammar usage, relevant vocabulary, developing and organising ideas on different topics. One of the main difficulties for learners to learn writing occurs due to the limited exposure to the language. Also, when students use language creatively and in specific contexts, they face problems. The challenges students encounter impede their writing (Kim, n.d.). Identifying those problems and providing feedback not only benefit in developing students' writing skills (Jabeen, Kazemian & Mustafai, 2015), but also it can help to examine the curriculum of preparatory programs (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Erdoğan, 2005; Khansir, 2012) and develop the quality of writing (Hammad, 2012). Thus, understanding the students' perception of

writing, issues concerning them, and factors contribute to those issues can guide instructors and students.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is (a) to identify the students' and instructors' perceptions of writing in the Foundation program, (b) to explore concerning issues in writing, and (c) to determine factors that contribute to those issues.

1.2.1. Rationale

Many studies investigated the issues related to writing concerning university students. Only some focused on Foundation level students' writing. Hence, most of them concentrated on identifying the difficulties students encountered and factors that hindered them from performing well in writing (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Polat, 2018; Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Kirkgoz, 2010; Fareed, 2016; Al Badi, 2015; Alfaki, 2015). However, no study merely focused on exploring the issues related to writing concerning Azerbaijani students. Lack of knowledge about the difficulties Azerbaijani students may face in the Foundation program urged to explore the topic. Furthermore, the survey results from the Capstone project team conducted among university students indicated that students mainly had difficulty choosing relevant vocabulary, organising ideas, and having poor content knowledge and ideas about the topic. Some students also mentioned making grammatical and punctuation errors when they produced written language in English. The survey results led the Capstone project team to research the issue further.

The rationale behind the choice of university to conduct the study was the Foundation program functioning in that university for over ten years. Students admitted to the university should complete the Foundation program, designed to develop their knowledge and skills in English and pass the exam before starting their undergraduate studies.

That being said, the Capstone team was interested in collecting data about the Foundation program to explore students' and instructors' perceptions of writing and reveal factors contributing to students' writing.

1.2.2. Research Questions

1. What are the Foundation program students' and instructors' perceptions about writing in public universities of Azerbaijan?

1.3. Significance of the study

The Capstone project team aimed to gather sufficient information on writing in the Foundation program, students' and instructors' perceptions about writing, concerning issues in writing, and to determine contributing factors to those issues.

The study results can benefit language instructors in understanding the main difficulties of students in writing and what caused these difficulties while studying in the Foundation program.

Additionally, the Capstone team aimed to deliver a workshop on "Utilising Techniques for Brainstorming Ideas and Providing Peer Feedback" to address the Foundation program retake students' challenges in writing.

Students will be able to apply the "lists and bullets" brainstorming technique, use the "Sandwich Model" to provide feedback to their peers and practice paragraph writing.

1.4. Definitions of the Terms

"Foundation program," refers to the programs which support students' transition to degree courses by giving those who lack the prerequisites a chance to begin studying at the degree level (Sanders & Daly, 2013).

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The primary purpose of this review was to identify students' challenges in writing and contributing factors in the literature. The Capstone team focused on research between 2002 and 2021 conducted in different countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Omani, Pakistan, Bahrain, Asian Countries (Japan, China), South Africa, and Australia. While some studies specifically focused on Foundation year students' writing challenges, others also considered undergraduate students. We approached the studies from three aspects: challenges in writing, factors contributing to these challenges, and existing suggestions in the literature.

2.1. Challenges in Writing

Previous studies on the challenges and the errors of students in academic writing have attempted to organise these problems into categories such as coherence and cohesion (Al Badi, 2015; Fareed & Ashraf, 2016; Pineteh, 2013) finding ideas and organisation (Afrin, 2016; Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Aldabbus, 2017) language errors (Kirmizi & Karci, 2017; Kırkgoz, 2010; Polat, 2018; Alfaki, 2015; Khan & Akter, 2011). According to the literature, from a language errors perspective, the most observed mistakes are related to grammar, punctuation, preposition, spelling, and vocabulary.

Polat (2018) emphasised many similarities in the mistakes of Azerbaijani and Turkish students in his research, focusing on grammatical, lexical, and spelling mistakes of Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Syrian students. The data for the case study was obtained from 15 English class students from Turkey, Syria, and Azerbaijan. Grammatical errors such as article, auxiliary verb, subject-verb agreement, tense, and preposition were the most observed error types in the groups. Most of the mistakes Azerbaijani students made in applying punctuation include omitting commas and full stops and using punctuation marks. On the other hand, the most common error of Syrian

students is capitalisation (Polat, 2018). From the perspective of lexical errors, usage of wrong words and unnecessary words were the most common among students.

Another research conducted by Fareed and Ashraf (2016) in Pakistan highlighted insufficient linguistic proficiency, including grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. In addition to the grammar errors mentioned above, the researcher has also mentioned the wrong usage of singular and plural nouns in the study. Some spelling errors were 'invention' and 'facility'; at the same time, punctuation errors included capitalisation and the use of commas and apostrophes (Fareed & Ashraf, 2016).

Aldabbus (2017), in his research about the challenges faced by foundation students in Bahrain, also indicated the problems caused by the omission of the verb "to be" and subject-verb agreement as the most striking weaknesses of the participants. The findings also revealed that prepositions in English were another area of challenge.

Challenges from the language use aspect can be seen in Asian countries as well. Izzo (1999) in Japan surveyed 34 professors in 20 Japanese universities to gather data about common errors in student writing. Overall, respondents reported 40 problem types, grouped into 18 categories later. According to the research, sentence development, verb tenses, usage of articles, and subject-verb agreement were the most common problems in Japan.

Al Fadda (2012) reported that students' main challenges at Saudi Arabian University King Saud University were determining differentiation between written and spoken words and phrases, grammar, subject-verb agreement, and making paragraphs.

In general, inappropriate use of articles, punctuation, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, spelling capitalisation, and verb tense were common challenges emphasised in the literature.

While some literature emphasised linguistic difficulties, some enlightened coherence and cohesion, organisation, finding ideas, and critical thinking. Data from a case study in South Africa examined writing challenges such as analysis of writing context, using writing to create social identities, the ability to research and apply knowledge across different contexts, and organising ideas and structure. Student academic papers were usually simple in developing *problems, theories, and arguments* (Gambel, 1987, as cited in Pineteh, 2014). Additionally, students submitted unedited assignments and lack careful organisation, which revealed that students were not aware of the drafting, revising, and redrafting process of writing (Pineteh, 2014). The discussions with the lectures of Communication Sciences also highlighted the lack of structural connection between the introduction, body and conclusion and applying the concept of coherence and cohesion (Gambel, 1987 as cited in Pineteh, 2014).

Another study at a university in Australia with 20 postgraduate international students of four nationalities (Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Omani) suggested that the most common mistake was related to coherence and cohesion. Others were related to writing their voice and finding relevant topics and sources; the last was referencing and citations (Al Badi, 2015).

On the other hand, an investigation study in the Omani Schools and Universities involved 1114 school students and 317 university students from Muscat, Batinah South, and Dhakeleye regions of Oman. The discussed problems included; coherently putting ideas, having ideas about the assigned topic, and deciding how to start a paragraph or essay (Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014). According to Afrin (2016), plagiarism was another serious problem among most students. The study involved eighty-nine undergraduate students majoring in English from different departments studying at Stamford University Bangladesh. The researcher analysed the problems in the paragraph; and found that most of them missed the structure that should consist of a

beginning, middle, and end. Given that students' writing lacked structure, unity, and irrelevant ideas (Afrin, 2016).

University students' English writing problems were instigated in Sudan as well. The study was conducted in the Teachers' College and the College of Education, Nile Valley University, North Sudan, in 2014. The findings were various, and many were connected to the organisation of the paragraphs (Alfaki, 2015). Pincas (1982, as cited in Alfaki, 2015) has also shown that learners have problems writing connected paragraphs because they failed to operate cohesive devices properly.

Ahmed (2010) aimed to investigate students' cohesion and coherence problems in writing in Egypt. The data was collected via semi-structured interviews with fourteen teachers and surveys with 165 student teachers. Concerning coherence problems in their English writing, one of the acknowledged problems was writing the introduction, thesis statement, topic sentence, concluding sentences, and conclusion. University lecturers confirmed that their students had difficulty in writing the thesis statement, the topic sentences, the transition, and the sequence of ideas (Ahmed, 2010).

Academic writing in Asian countries is one of the significant problems for students and teachers. The researcher in China claimed that English courses in mainland China mainly focus on teaching for general purposes rather than academic purposes. The study data was collected from the survey of 50 Master of Arts students in the English for Academic Purposes program at a university in South China. The findings indicated that students had greater writing structure difficulty than language problems (Cai, 2013). Besides, difficulties in lexical and stylistic aspects of academic writing were emphasised in the research conducted in the EAP programs (Hinkel, 2003; Shaw & Liu, 1998).

2.2. Contributing factors

Literature review in academic writing of Foundation level students identified several internal and external contributing factors for the low performance of students. Unwillingness and lack of motivation to use the target language were considered internal factors that challenge students to acquire productive skills (Rico, 2014; Ahmed, 2010). Motivation impacts students' learning and can increase productivity (Areej, 2012, as cited in Mukminin, 2014). Observations showed that students were reluctant to use the language unless the instructor forced them. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) considered the unsupportive, large, and crowded class environment as a leading cause for the lack of motivation of Pakistani students, which eventually affects the quality of their writing. Similarly, in another study, students highlighted that teachers required them to write well; however, they did not motivate them. The results of the study conducted by Cai (2013) also found that students did not have intrinsic motivation for writing; they wrote to complement the course and graduate from the university, which could be one of the reasons for their poor performance.

Writing is difficult for native and non-native students since it requires a balance of different issues such as content, structure, grammar, vocabulary, ideas, and organisation (Abu, 2001, as cited in Alfaki, 2015). The study of writing problems of Azerbaijani, Turkish and Syrian students (Polat, 2018) revealed that structural language differences were the main contributing factors to students' grammatical errors, especially in the usage of auxiliary words and perfect tenses. Further, the lack of the equivalence of the perfect tenses and other grammatical differences in these languages prevented the students from making mistakes, mainly in these areas. Misusing articles and prepositions and over-generalization were among the most common interlingual errors students made in their writing (Aldabbus, 2017; Kirkgoz, 2010; Kirmizi & Karci, 2017; Polat, 2018). As such, a lack of comprehensive knowledge of the target language was the most pivotal factor that hindered quality writing.

Another similar study by Kirkgoz (2010) defined the interference of the mother tongue as one of the contributing factors to students' problems in writing. Considering that English and Turkish languages have different grammatical structures, when students try to transfer grammatical knowledge of their native language (Turkish) into English, it results in errors in writing.

Aldabbus (2017) also mentioned L1 interference as one of the reasons for students' difficulties in writing that Bahrain students encounter at the foundational level.

Additionally, several studies stated that a lack of lexical and vocabulary knowledge was one of the main difficulties for students to produce written work on many topics, even if they were interested. As a result, students' weak literacy skills hindered them from performing well in academic writing (Kirkgoz, 2010; Rico, 2014; Pineteh, 2013). Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) also mentioned that students think in their native language and translate their thoughts into English which results in weak writing.

Moreover, students' educational background also plays a significant role in their writing. Prior knowledge of students in writing was considered one of the most influential factors for their performance. Most students were learning their native language at school, and the curriculum was focused on exams, leading to memorisation among students. They preferred to pass the exams by memorising the texts rather than acquiring the language (Afrin, 2016). In this respect, the study by Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) revealed that one factor that affects Saudi Arabian students' writing was that English was not the medium of instruction in primary schools. They used English as a medium of instruction in only higher education courses. Therefore, students' poor high school knowledge of the English language hinders them from performing well in writing (Pineteh, 2013; Afrin, 2016; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016).

Teachers' methodology is an external factor that makes productive skills challenging (Rico, 2014; Pineteh, 2013; Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). The study conducted by Fareed, Ashraf, and

Bilal (2016) found that outdated teaching styles, untrained teachers, and ineffective teaching methods were pivotal factors in contributing to performing well in academic writing. Lack of constructive feedback was among the contributing factors mentioned by South African students. They stated that although teachers expected us to think out of the box, use high-order thinking and be creative, they did not provide quality feedback to understand our mistakes and improve our academic writing. Instructors' lack of individual approach was another example of poor teaching instruction contributing to students' low performance (Pineteh, 2013). Besides, Aldabbus (2017) stated that some students were unaware of their weaknesses, which challenged them to overcome their difficulties in writing.

A few studies found that time allocation also affected the quality of writing. According to Aldabbus (2017), more than the time for practising the language and writing in class was needed to acquire quality writing skills. Teachers fail to approach students individually due to insufficient time (Afrin, 2016). Quantum and Chakraverty (2000) mentioned the importance of giving enough time to students to think about the topic and organise their ideas (as cited in Alfaki, 2015).

Since many students struggle to learn and develop their writing, it becomes much more difficult for non-native students (Kim, n.d). The mentioned factors also make it much more challenging for students. Understanding those contributing factors could give us insight into achieving better writing performance.

2.3. Suggestions for improving the writing of students

Reviewed literature revealed suggestions for teaching and learning that may have improved the students' writing. Many studies showed that writing challenges were related to students' reading skills. To write effectively, students should have a good background in their reading, preferably from extensive reading habits that can enrich the ingredients of writing considerably (Han,

2011). Alfak (2015) and Gordon (2008) claimed that intensive reading increases the capacity of vocabulary, grammatical structures and outlook of students. Reading also contributes to the familiarisation of students with different writing styles. It is suggested that while teaching writing, teachers can use authentic materials such as; newspapers, journals, and letters or let students choose what they want to read (Olness, 2005; Al Murshidi, 2014). However, students' levels should be considered while assigning readings (Herrero, 2007). Considering students' levels, teachers can provide students with well-produced academic essays by other students. Those readings will facilitate students in acquiring a new lexicon, differentiating writing styles, and widening the scope of grammatical constructions in writing (Amin & Alamin, 2012; Aldabbus, 2017; Giridharan, n.d.). Eventually, teachers should integrate reading and writing and ignite students' critical thinking while reading and producing written material. Integrated reading and writing will perhaps revitalise their confidence and minimise the ethos of 'writing to pass', which invariably puts tremendous pressure on students and ultimately increases the amount of plagiarism in academic writing (Bailey, 2008; Bacha, 2002; Kinsler, 1990).

Feedback is one of the most effective teaching strategies teachers can utilise while teaching writing to students. Referring to it, Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, and Swann (2003) stated that providing feedback on learners' writing was a critical pedagogical practice in higher education. However, the quality of feedback is significant. Teachers and peers can provide feedback in class but should be aware of its quality. They should ensure that they give constructive feedback and that their feedback is clear and genuine. According to Alfak (2017) and Ahmed (2010), teachers should make sure that they not only criticise students' writing but also give encouragement and mention good parts. As a result, students will be more willing to receive feedback (Alfak, 2017). Teachers' feedback is likely to fail when the feedback is too general and does not demonstrate what is expected from students. Therefore, providing clear and concise feedback is pivotal. Instructors' feedback assists students in monitoring their progress

and identifying specific language areas that need to be improved (Hedge, 2000). EFL teachers' corrections were related to surface-level problems, focusing on spelling, tense, punctuation, forgetting content, and organisation that affected meaning and communication (Zamel, 1985); Cited in (Alamirew, 2005, p. 100). Ahmed's study (2010) revealed that writing multiple drafts emphasises the "publication" of students' work. Teachers' comments that focused more on content and organisation than on grammatical errors helped them produce better pieces of written composition and develop more self-confidence in writing.

Due to the reason that teachers have less time to check the writings of students, and providing detailed feedback can be ineffective. Therefore, Aldabus (2017) and Han (2011) suggested that the issue could be minimized by substituting peer, group, and whole-class checking. The findings of Ahmed's study (2011) showed that when students received feedback from their peers, they experienced less anxiety than students who got feedback from teachers. Those students were more willing to review their writings. Checking peers' works contributed to the realization of their errors. In addition, when students read their writings in front of the whole class could make them more responsible for the writing tasks (Aldabus, 2017). A significant benefit of peer correction was emphasised as well. By correcting their classmates' errors, students could become more critical learners of the language (Kırkgöz, 2010).

Moreover, teaching writing skills can benefit from self-evaluation. Error correction can appear in the form of self-correction. However, firstly teachers should employ error-correction strategies, such as using symbols. By correcting his/her mistake, the student can become aware of his/her error and learn that particular language item better (Kırkgöz, 2010; Aldabus, 2017).

Researchers highlighted that students produced better writing when they knew the purpose of writing and its objectives. One of the weaknesses of teaching writing was unclear objectives, and they argued that children could only achieve a goal if they knew the goal and understood how to

achieve it (Fisher & Ros, 2008). Rashid Han (2011) recommended that objectives should be formulated and reviewed. Additionally, expectations of teachers and institutions should also be delivered, and teachers should remind students about those while producing writing. Awareness of the task's requirements and the instructor's expectations was a fundamental factor in success in academic writing (Pillai, 2014, as cited in Al Badi, 2015).

Some studies emphasise the importance of students' needs in teaching writing. Instructors should be aware of individual ESL learners' differences based on their prior knowledge and ability or potential to develop academic writing capabilities (Al Badi, 2015; Ahmed, 2010; Pineteh, 2011). Given that teachers can utilise diagnostic tests at the beginning of the academic year to define students' levels and needs. Afterwards, instructors may modify their syllabus according to test results (Chou, as cited in Al Badi, 2015). Al Badi (2015) and Pineteh (2011) suggested that in an attempt to meet the needs of students, teachers should employ different teaching strategies.

Writing is a skill; therefore, it is learned by practice, just like any other skill (Alfak, 2015). According to Davies (1998), "Writing is essentially a creative process, and good writers must learn to communicate their ideas clearly to an unseen audience (p.25). Writing takes much practice. If one strives to become a good driver, the best way for him or her is to drive. Similarly, writing a lot is the best way to become a proficient writer (Alfak, 2015). Maintaining portfolio writing, writing wall magazines, poetry competitions, vocabulary contests, annual writing symposiums, email writing, and free writing could be some of the valuable measures to be organised by teachers teaching writing (Han, 2011; Alfak, 2015; Aldabbus, 2017).

When writing tasks are related to students' lives and the real world, they tend to produce more successful writing tasks. Ahmed (2010) and Han (2011) stated that teachers should think of enjoyable activities linked to learners' lives while teaching writing. Moreover,

integrating writing and other subjects could increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning writing (Jacobs, 2011, as cited in Pineteh, 2013).

The reviewed literature included challenges and factors contributing to the student's academic writing. According to the literature review, students have struggled with punctuation, preposition, spelling, and vocabulary from a language usage perspective. Besides that, organisation, coherence, and cohesion, finding ideas are the other common challenges. The studies in this area also enabled us to identify some factors such as motivation, methodology of the teachers, structure differences in the languages, and time and background of the students contributing to these challenges. The literature provided suggestions to overcome these challenges, such as connecting the writing task with real life, enabling students to know the purpose of writing, providing feedback, scaffolding, and acquiring more effective teaching strategies for self and peer evaluation.

In conclusion, there are a large number of studies on the writing challenges of students worldwide, and Azerbaijani students are only mentioned as part of the study in Turkey. However, since this research focuses on writing issues of the Foundation year students in Azerbaijan universities, the data on this topic is scarce in the literature. We aim to investigate writing issues, find factors, and provide suggestions to contribute to Azerbaijan literature in this field.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

3.1. Description of Methodology

As this study aimed to explore the perceptions of the Foundation program students and instructors in writing, including issues concerning students and factors contribute to those issues, a qualitative explorative approach was considered more reasonable. Qualitative research expresses people's viewpoints and opinions in a setting where they communicate and evaluate the applicability of people's lives in actual life scenarios (Creswell, 2007; Merrriam & Tisdell, 2014; Yin, 2018).

3.2. Design of the Study

Considering paradigms, an interpretive viewpoint was used to highlight the subjective nature of truthfulness and offer deeper acknowledgements of a particular situation (Willis, 2007). As interpretive research practitioners with a qualitative perspective, we believe that reality consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world. Our research participants' constructed realities assisted us in viewing the writing in the Foundation program through their perspectives (Crotty, 1998).

3.2.1. Participants

Non-probability sampling was used to identify the specific group. As a type of this, convenience sampling was conducted to investigate the central phenomenon of our study for easy access (Brodsky & Given, 2008) to persons and institution. According to Patton (1990), convenience sampling is used to select respondents who could provide comprehensive information about the target environment. Owing to the sampling method, we could select the sources from which we will obtain the most about the subject.

We purposefully selected nine writing instructors. The Capstone team was aware of sampling bias, which threatened external validity and limited the generalizability of our findings to a

broader group of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Still, only female instructors have been teaching writing in the Foundation program. Two faculty members who are foreign citizens teach language use and listening and speaking only.

The participants' years of writing teaching experience are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Teaching experience of Instructors in Writing

Participants	Position	Year of writing teaching experience
P1	Senior Instructor	12 years
P2	Senior Instructor	Nine years
P3	Senior Instructor	Ten years
P4	Senior Instructor	11 years
P5	Senior Instructor	Nine years
P6	Manager	Four years
P7	Senior Instructor	Ten years
P8	Senior Instructor	Nine years
P9	Senior Instructor	Nine years

We chose the students intentionally with the help of the instructors. Nine students participated in two focus group discussions, five boys and four girls between 17 and 18. The description of the gender and age of the students is provided in Table 2.

Table 2*Demographic Profile of Research Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender
S1	18	Male
S2	18	Female
S3	18	Female
S4	18	Male
S5	17	Female
S6	17	Male
S7	18	Male
S8	17	Female
S9	17	Male

3.2.2. Research Site

The study was conducted at a public university in Azerbaijan. This university delivers the Foundation program to prepare first-year students to study their academic subjects in English.

3.3. Data Collection

Before the interviews, we collected the responses of 120 foundation program students based on the survey conducted prior to informing the research problem (Braun et al., 2021).

We conducted two focus group interviews with the students (Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger & Casey, 2000). The focus group interviews enabled us to get information about ideas, feelings, beliefs, opinions, or personal preferences the students may have about the research problem as well as illuminated the differences in perspective between groups of individuals (Rabiee, 2014). The first focus group interview was held on campus, and four students attended. One of the participants joined the meeting, and we used Zoom to interview that student. We recorded the interview process to ensure confirmability; this was the preferred technique to display respondents'

comments. The second focus group interview date overlapped with the national holiday Novruz, and we held that interview online via Zoom since the campus was closed. Five students attended the second interview. Data was collected in Azerbaijani considering the English level of the Foundation program students and then translated into English (Al-Amer et al., 2015). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data from the instructors.

We recorded the interviews and provided the participants with consent forms (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.3.1. Instruments

The Capstone team utilised two instruments to collect the data: semi-structured interviews with the writing instructors and focus group interviews with the Foundation program students.

3.3.2. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Instructors

We used a semi-structured interview protocol encompassing eighteen questions (Yin, 2018) to explore the instructors' perceptions about the issues related to the Foundation program students' writing in English and possible factors that may contribute to them (See Appendix A). Some of the questions were: (9) "What is your students' general hindrance to writing?", (10) "What are some common challenges in students' writing?", (12) "What are the reasons for students' poor writing?"

3.3.3. Focus Group Interview Protocol for Students

We also developed a focus group interview protocol consisting of fourteen questions to investigate students' perceptions of writing in English to gather primary data (See Appendix B). Some interview questions were: (5) "How do you find writing? Is it easy or difficult? If difficult, then why? What are your main difficulties in writing?"

3.4. Data Analysis

As the qualitative study generated a great amount of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), we needed to recognise and assess the oral form of data.

We used thematic analysis because it allowed us to associate an analysis of the frequency of a theme with one the whole content. Additionally, it was used to analyse classifications and present themes (Alhojailan & Ibrahim, 2012). The first step was familiarising with the data by transcribing the audio and taking notes. After transcribing the data, we coded and identified patterns among them to find the themes (Caulfield, 2022; Saldana, 2013). We also translated the students' responses from Azerbaijani into English while coding.

We contrasted every significant unit with one another using constant comparative data analysis to interpret the data (Yin, 2018).

3.4.1. Trustworthiness

In a qualitative methodology, trustworthiness is evidence for the claim that the discoveries are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given that, we recorded the interview process to ensure confirmability, as this was the preferred technique to display respondents' comments.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, we used data triangulation by comparing focus group students' responses to the instructors' answers shared during the individual interviews (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Member check was also applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1990) to ensure credibility.

Here, the focus was whether the informants' transcriptions accurately reflected their true intentions. The Capstone team also employed peer scrutiny to ensure credibility in the research process (Pitts, 1994).

3.4.2. Ethical Issues

It is essential to protect research respondents and their confidence in the interview (Cresswell, 2017). We provided participants with a consent form, and only after getting their written consent we recorded the interviews (Mant & Licari, 2018). (See Appendix C and D)

Furthermore, we developed a parental consent form to ensure the arrangement of a child's parent(s) or custodian to the participants of their child in the study (Cline & Nelson, 2013). (See Appendix E)

Moreover, participants were informed that their identities would be confidential and would not be shared with third parties. We coded the names of the involved university and the participants in our research to ensure their anonymity.

3.5. Limitations

The scope of this study was small, and the data was from a single university. That is why the findings of this study may lead to over-generalization. Initially, we aimed for two higher education institutions in Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to access one of the two research sites even though the permission letter had been sent to the university's rector.

For that reason, we increased the sample size for the other university. In that university, we could interview nine instructors and nine students even though our goal was 10 for each. Therefore, further investigations should be conducted on a larger scale. Another limitation of this study was the language of the interviews.

Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the students' and instructors' perceptions of writing, to explore the writing issues of Foundation level students, and reveal contributing factors for those issues. This chapter of the study is designed to answer the following research question.

- What are Foundation program students' and instructors' perceptions about writing in public universities of Azerbaijan?

For this reason, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the language instructors of the English for Academic Purposes Program in one of Azerbaijan's public higher education institutions. They all were experienced faculty members.

Besides, two focus group interviews were held with the Foundation year students of the same program. The findings demonstrated students' and instructors' perceptions. This chapter has the following sub-topics: foundation program, challenges, contributing factors, and suggestions.

4.1. Foundation Program: Instructors' perceptions

All nine language instructors we interviewed stated that they started with a sentence and paragraph level and then moved to essay writing. "We start from sentence level to paragraph, from paragraph to essay level, to teach them in writing classes", explained Instructor 9. Most of the participants mentioned various essay types taught at the Foundation program. "Usually they start with essay types, and then they have cause-effect essays, then compare, contrast, then classification, essay arguments, essay at least I think, five or six types during this semester", reported Instructor 6. The other participants also confirmed that they started with sentence level, followed by paragraphs, and they taught six types of essays in total.

Besides teaching essay types, the instructors in the Foundation program at X University also focused on improving many skills, such as expressing themselves, paraphrasing skills, summarising skills, and critical thinking. Instructor 9 shared:

We also teach them some writing strategies and skills they need to improve to further their education at the University: paraphrasing, summarising skills, sentence structures, and how to apply different sentence structures in writing to avoid repetitions and wordiness in their writing.

The most mentioned skill was summarizing. Five out of nine instructors commented on it and emphasized the importance of developing summarising skills.

We asked instructors about their perceptions of their students' success after finishing the Foundation program. Six instructors out of nine agreed that students finishing the Foundation program could continue their undergraduate studies. Instructor 5 stated:

When the students finish the foundation, they already have skills in academic writing. They know to create a paragraph, research, paraphrase, summarise, improve critical thinking, and write different essay patterns. They already know how to connect ideas and use the vocabulary, which makes them ready for general education or for a bachelor's degree or master's degree. However, the students who have not done foundation, I think that they can struggle somehow.

Only three of the nine instructors doubted some students' success after the Foundation program. "Either I think that 70 or 80% of EAPP students are only ready for their education or the rest who pass just 73. They struggle there", claimed Instructor 5.

Overall, the instructors assumed that students who finished the Foundation program could start their bachelor's degree with developed language skills.

4.1.1. Foundation Program: Students' Perceptions.

This section demonstrates the perceptions of the students at the Foundation program.

All nine students considered this program helpful in their education. Most of the students underlined the instructors' support. "Teachers were always supportive, commented on our mistakes, and provided explanations." ["Müəllimlər hər zaman dəstək olurdular, səhvlərimizi göstərir və izahat verirdilər"], claimed Student 6.

Some students reported that Foundation program differed from other language courses because it taught professional language. "I also think Foundation program is very beneficial for us. I used to attend the language courses, but after taking this program, I now see the differences. You learn the language professionally." [Mən də hesab edirəm ki, bu proqram bizim üçün çox faydalıdır. Əvvəllər dil kurslarında iştirak edirdim, lakin bu proqramdan sonra indi fərqləri görürəm. Siz dili peşəkar şəkildə öyrənirsiniz.], reported Student 7.

Five out of nine students found writing difficult at the beginning of the year. "Actually, writing was hard for me at the beginning." [Əslində yazmaq mənim üçün ilk vaxtlar çətin idi.], stated Student 6.

We also asked the students about their perceptions of success after finishing the program; eight out of nine reported that they felt ready to start the undergraduate degree after finishing the Foundation program. Only Student 4 shared some concerns:

I don't think we will be ready for the undergraduate program because English is not our lifestyle yet. We only study during the class. We speak to our friends in Azerbaijani, not in English. This is the problem.

[Mən bakalavr proqramına hazır olacağımızı düşünmürəm, çünki ingilis dili hələ bizim həyat tərzimiz deyil. Biz ancaq dərs zamanı oxuyuruq. Dostlarımızla ingiliscə yox, azərbaycanca danışıyıq. Problem budur.]

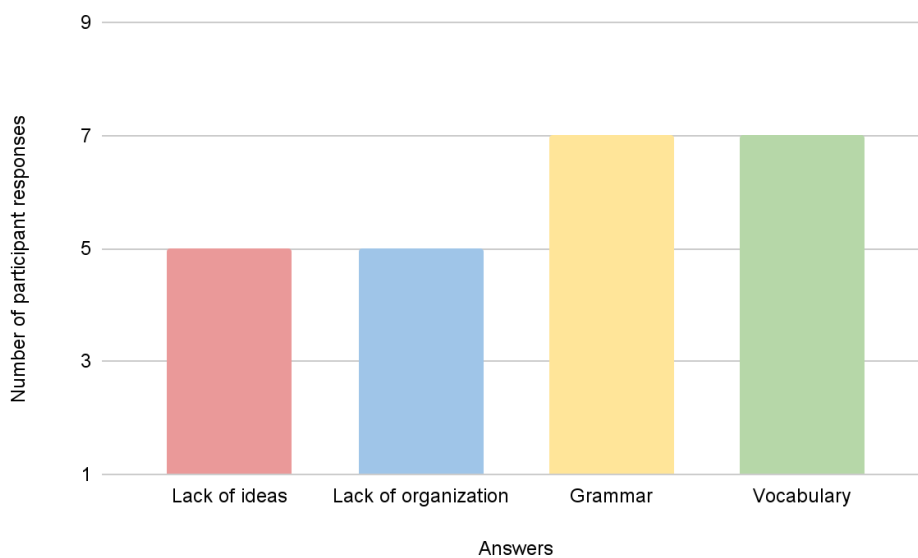
Overall, focus group interviews with the students highlighted the supportiveness of the instructors and perceived the Foundation program beneficial for their future education.

4.2. Challenges: Instructors' perceptions.

The analysis of the research findings presented that students' main challenges were grammar, syntax, choosing the right vocabulary to express their ideas, coherently organizing the ideas, and lack of ideas to write (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Instructors' perception of students' challenges in writing



Most of the participants complained that many students struggled to apply grammar patterns in their writing. They tended to make simple sentences or used incorrect grammar structures.

“Students learn grammar during the lesson, but they forget to use it when it comes to writing”, mentioned Instructor 7.

Using conjunctions in English was another area of challenge. Interference of native language caused students to make mistakes in grammar patterns in their second language. Instructor 3 commented on the challenge:

Students tend to use a comma with “because”. It is the number one influence of the language on the second language. Sometimes, grammar is challenging because some patterns that we are teaching them do not exist in our language.

Misuse or no use of punctuation was also among the challenges students faced when writing. Students were unaware of the importance of punctuation marks in their writing. They either did not use punctuation marks when it was necessary or used them in the wrong place in sentences.

“Some students don't use any punctuation, for example, no comma. I had one student who didn't use any commas and a full stop”, indicated Instructor 5.

Several participants emphasized vocabulary as another major problem that students encountered while writing. According to instructors, they lacked appropriate vocabulary. Students did not use words in the context properly. Instructor 7 believed:

Sometimes students face problems with the right usage of synonyms, which means that they know much, but they don't refer to the context, or they just write without paying attention to the context.

Some of the instructors also added that students' lexicon was not rich enough. Students usually used informal language and repeated the same words instead of using synonyms. They struggled to choose the right words to express their ideas. “Some keep this informal language like “gonna, wanna” in their writing, although they are told that it is not good to have this kind of language in academic writing”, underlined Instructor 6.

The findings of the study revealed that a considerable number of students needed help organizing their writing coherently. Especially, they were confusing main and supporting ideas or could not relate them.

Instructor 5 stated:

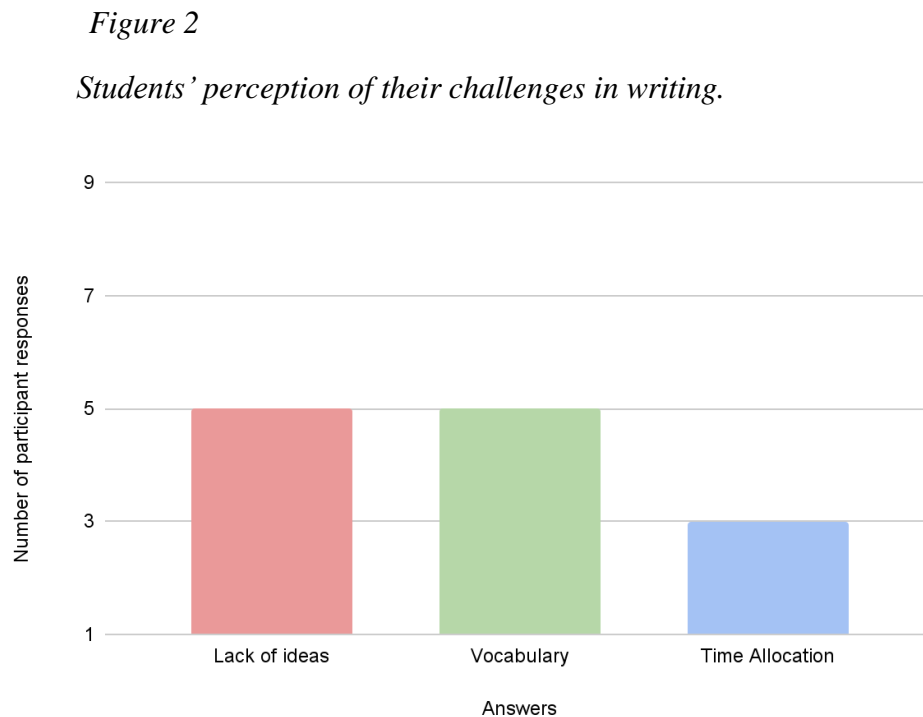
The main problem of the students is usually organization; the students cannot defer the main idea, main points, and main details. They usually mix the main idea with the supporting points, supporting points with the details.

Additionally, not having enough ideas affected the quality of students' writing. Starting to write was challenging for students. “Most of our youngsters, unfortunately, cannot prove their points of view and cannot support their points of view. They cannot simply describe the situation”,

stated Instructor 1. Therefore, the lack of ideas led to repetition, and students reproduced the same notions when they were paraphrasing.

4.2.1. Challenges: Students' perceptions.

Data analysis of focus group interviews showed that the major challenge for students in writing was finding ideas and using appropriate vocabulary. Also, some students mentioned that the time allocated to take writing exams was a challenge for them. (See Figure 2)



Most students had difficulty finding ideas to write on specific topics. They struggled due to a lack of worldview and information about different concepts and topics. “For me, it is difficult to find new ideas. Sometimes it is difficult to improve your ideas, to make them continuous. Sometimes I write an idea, and I do not know how to continue with it”, reported Student 5. Another student indicated that providing examples to support ideas was difficult. Student 4 believed, “Sometimes it is difficult for me to show examples.” The students’ responses displayed the difficulties they had when finding ideas to write on specific topics.

The second major challenge students mentioned was using academic vocabulary in their writing and finding the appropriate words to express their ideas. Students pointed out that they usually translated words from their first language (L1) to language two (L2), and the translation was not always successful. Commenting on the L1 and L2, Student 8 shared the following:

Sometimes, we could not find the correct words to express our opinions. It was my main difficulty in writing paragraphs and essays. I was trying to use phrases, but the equivalent of these phrases was different in English. [Bəzən fikirlərimizi ifadə etmək üçün doğru sözü tapa bilmirik. Esselərdə, paraqraflarda ən böyük çətinliyim bu idi. Söz birləşməsi yazmaq istəyirdim amma bu birləşmə ingilis dilində fərqli ifadə olunurdu, qarşılığı eyni deyildi.]

Some students indicated time allocation as one of the challenges. S4 explained:

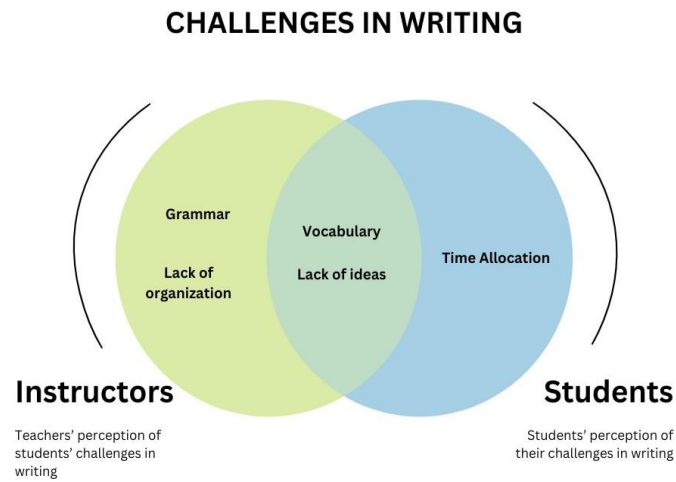
My problem is the same as others: Time management. It takes time to think and decide which words I should use. [Mənim problemim digərləri ilə eynidir. Sözləri düzgün seçmək və onları yerində işlətmək vaxt aparır.]

Using academic vocabulary in writing was a challenge for students as well as finding appropriate words.

Overall, according to the research findings, exam duration, lack of vocabulary, and ideas were the main challenges that students listed.

Figure 3

Perceptions of instructors and students: Challenges in Writing



4.3. Contributing Factors: Instructors' Perceptions.

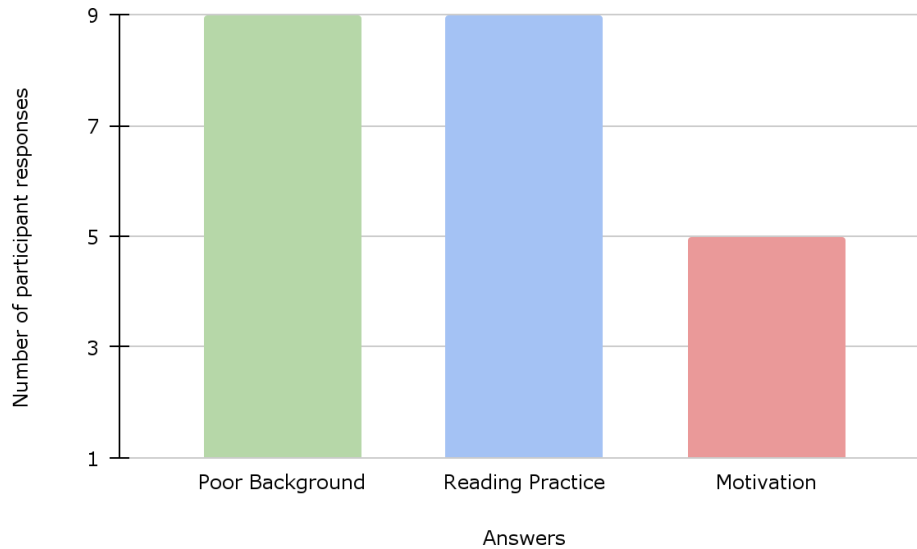
According to the respondents, students' general outlook, the digital era, the first language inference (L1), and teaching methods were among the factors contributing to students' writing challenges.

Additionally, the instructors indicated that students were not aware of the importance of writing. They lacked imagination and creativity in their writing, and time limitations in the Foundation program did not allow students to have enough practice.

The most mentioned factors were the students' poor background, motivation, and lack of reading practice (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

Contributing Factors from Instructors' Perception



All instructors assumed that having no writing background from school years was the most common contributing factor to students writing. Instructor 1 pointed out, “They- students do not take their writing classes at school, so their background is quite weak. No one teaches us at school how to write an email, and it should somewhere start.”

As clear from the given opinion, the main concern of the instructors was that teachers at school did not teach how to write simple paragraphs. Instructor 5 explained that students simply did not like writing and linked it to school education:

Sometimes students usually do not like writing. They have no skill in writing. Because at school, unfortunately, they are never taught paragraphs. They know the word ‘essay’. Nevertheless, they have no idea what an essay is and how it is written.

Most instructors supposed that teachers at school lack methods to teach writing. Instructor 6 shared:

The main problem is that school teachers do not know much about writing. We hope that, gradually, we will have better teachers who can teach writing and students who can write better.

Another factor reported by the participants was that reading less affected students' performance in writing as well. Instructor 2 explained that students could not find the ideas, and it was the result of less reading practice:

They do not read books. Without reading, they cannot have ideas to enhance their knowledge. We need to be knowledgeable to express our ideas.

Likewise, Instructor 4 indicated:

If they are aware of the topic, they write perfectly. They have to read. Modern kids, modern students, I can say, stopped reading. That is a problem. They do not have any idea.

The instructors noted the motivation of the students as another crucial factor. One instructor stated that students only practising writing when the assignment was graded. "Whenever I ask them to solve and indicate it is not graded, they are not motivated", claimed Instructor 2. To eliminate this problem, the instructors suggested that explaining the importance of writing in the students' daily life could motivate them. Considering the problem, 5 shared the following comment:

When we explain how important it is to learn academic writing, and how they can integrate it into their education into their work life, then they understand the importance and do it much better.

Many instructors also mentioned having limited time during the term and the program's intensity as significant factors. Instructor 9 shared:

I would like to say that our program is very intensive. Imagine that within two months. Besides their listening, speaking, reading classes, and language classes, they should do two to six paragraphs graded one through six different types of paragraphs or two

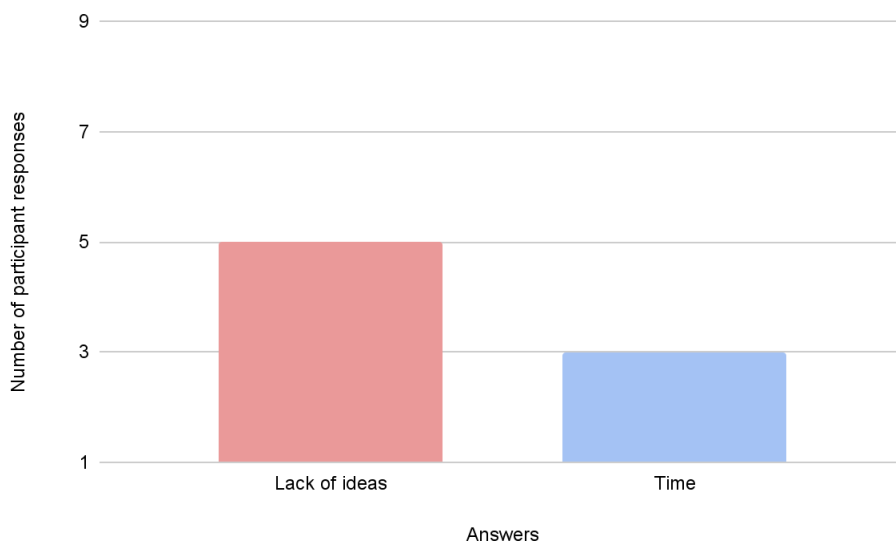
different kinds of essays to write two times each. So, I think that it is really a little bit of a burden for them. I would say it's not enough for them to practise, understand to digest, but we do much practice, but it does not help sometimes.

According to the participants, the main contributing factors were the students' poor background in writing, low motivation, and lack of reading practice.

4.3.1. Contributing Factors: Students' Perceptions

Most of the students agreed that lack of ideas, time limitation in exams, prior knowledge, lack of worldview, self-motivation, first language interference, and school education were the main factors contributing to their challenges in writing. However, lack of ideas and time limitations in the exam were the most mentioned factors (See Figure 5).

*Figure 5
Contributing factors from students' perception*



Most students considered lacking ideas in their writing as the main factor behind their poor results. They associated this factor with reading fewer books/articles and having a general worldview. Student 9 stated that having extra information and ideas increased his/her grade:

Having additional information about the topics helps a lot in our writing. In my first essay, I got 72, even though it was simple. The last one was about ecotourism. It was more difficult and specific. But I got 87 from that. The reason was I had read many articles about it before. [Mövzular haqqında əlavə məlumatın olması yazılarımıza çox kömək edir. İlk esemdə sadə olsa da, 72 aldım. Sonuncusu ekoturizmlə bağlı idi. Daha çətin və konkret idi. Amma ondan 87 aldım. Səbəb o idi ki, əvvəllər bu haqda çoxlu yazılar oxumuşdum.]

Another student reported that having the proper vocabulary to express those ideas was crucial.

Student 8 commented on the point:

I also agree with my friends that having ideas is essential. Sometimes we cannot find the proper vocabulary to express ideas. In essays and paragraphs, it was my main difficulty. [Mən də dostlarımla razıyam ki, ideaların olması vacibdir. Bəzən fikirlərimizi ifadə etmək üçün lazımi söz tapa bilmirik. Esselərdə və paraqraflarda mənim əsas çətinliyim bu idi.]

The majority agreed that reading impacted their worldview and supported them in finding ideas.

Student 5 believed:

Finding ideas is really difficult for me. You need to have a strong vocabulary to write a good essay. I think reading a lot helps find ideas” [“İdeya tapmaq mənim üçün çox çətinidir. Yaxşı bir esse yazmaq üçün güclü söz ehtiyatına sahib olmalısınız. Düşünürəm ki, çox oxumaq fikir tapmağa kömək edir”].

Several students complained about time limitations in the exams. Student 8 stated:

We have 45 minutes for exams. In this time frame choosing the topic and ideas and applying them is difficult. [İmtahanlarda 45 dəqiqə vaxtımız var. Bu zaman çərçivəsində mövzu, ideya seçmək və onları tətbiq etmək çətinidir.]

Overall, the students found inadequate ideas and time limitations as the main factors contributing to their challenges in writing. Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate the overall findings in terms of the student's challenges in writing and the contributing factors (See Tables 5 & 6).

Table 3

Contributing Factors and student challenges in Writing from the Instructors' Perspective

C a t e g o r y	Factors	Challenges
E n v i r o n m e n t a l f a c t o r s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ School education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Instructors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching methods - Teachers' lack of education about writing - Tests, memorising, not writing assignments → Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor background in writing - Lack of knowledge - Students don't understand the importance of writing - Not practising writing ❖ Digital Era <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excessive usage of gadgets ❖ Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensity of the course - Limited time for essay writing ❖ Mother tongue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interference with the first language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of grammar skills - Lack of vocabulary - Lack of organisation - Differences in the grammar and word choice between L1 and L2

S t u d e n t s r e l a t e d f a c t o r s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Student characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not liking writing - No Motivation - Laziness - Shyness - Lacking confidence - Lacking imagination - Lacking creativity - Lacking critical thinking - General World-view ❖ Exposure to the language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not reading books - Not writing in daily life - Not doing research - Not listening to natives - Not practising 	- Lack of ideas
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Table 4

Contributing factors and student challenges in writing from students' perspective

C a t e g o r y	Factors	Challenges
E n v i r o n m e n t a l f a c t o r s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ School education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not practising at school - Reading and retelling only - Not focusing on the English language Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 45 minutes in exams Mother tongue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interference with the first language 	<p>Lack of vocabulary</p> <p>Lack of time to brainstorm ideas and write</p> <p>Inappropriate usage of vocabulary</p>

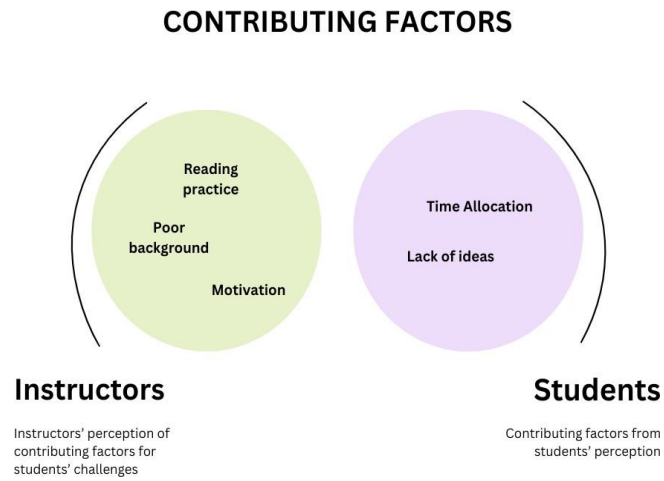
<p>t o r s</p>		
<p>S t u d e n t r e l a t e d f a c t o r s</p>	<p>Student characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laziness - Self-motivation to study - General Worldview <p>Exposure to the language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not reading - Lacking ideas - Not using the language in daily life 	<p>Lack of ideas</p>

The tables demonstrate the findings from two perspectives; instructors and students.

Additionally, it explains the factors and challenges as a result in two categories; environmental and student-related.

Figure 6

Perceptions of instructors and students: Contributing Factors



4.4. Suggestions: Instructors' Perceptions.

Both instructors and students commented on some strategies that could improve the student's writing performance. According to the study results, the following recommendations were considered the most effective ones to improve students' writing (See Figure 7).

Figure 7

Suggestions to improve the writing from instructors' perception



The most mentioned recommendations were providing oral or written feedback, improving reading skills, and encouraging students to write.

All the instructors mentioned that they provided students with feedback several times while they were completing assignments. Instructor 3 believed, “It is very important because students must know what a problem is; if they do not know the problem, they cannot overcome it.”

All of the nine educators highlighted several strategies for giving feedback, such as oral and written feedback, peer feedback, discussion boards, and rubrics as means of feedback.

Four instructors out of nine stated that students were asked to comment on one another's first drafts. Additionally, three participants added that they used discussion boards on the Blackboard, and students read peers' writing and commented on their work. Instructor 3 explained, “For example, they write the paragraphs or essays on the course page, on the discussion board. And the students give them feedback.”

All Instructors were certain that they provided both written and oral feedback. Students were given rubrics for upcoming tasks beforehand. They also specified ways of giving written feedback. One teacher reported that she corrected several mistakes, provided some examples for students, and explained how they could improve their mistakes. Instructor 2 shared the following insight, “I underline mistakes and correct 2-3 errors in the paper so that they can see.”

Some instructors added that even though all students received written feedback on their written assignments, some students may have needed help understanding it. Therefore, they invited students to office hours, allowed them to ask questions, and provided explanations and/or clarifications individually in the office. Instructor 8 noted:

However, some students still read feedback and do not understand and tell please just provide feedback. In that case, students are invited to your office, and you give them feedback on the points they did not understand.

Five out of nine interviewees stated that lacking motivation results in poor writing. In this regard, three instructors stressed that they strived to encourage their students. Instructor 1 stated,

“Because you cannot force them, you can only encourage them.” Instructor 5 also shared something similar:

Even if it is something new, something that other people do not accept if they have enough arguments, explanations, examples, and facts, I encourage them to express it.

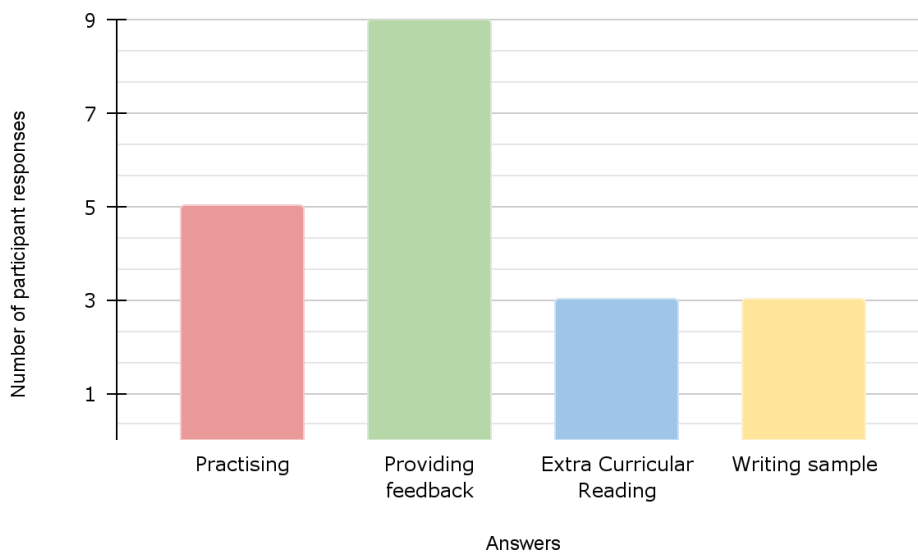
The majority of interviewed instructors shared that they tried to make their students practise a lot by assigning many writing tasks during the foundation program. Moreover, six instructors believed that they focused on developing learners' reading and research skills in the foundation year. Instructor 5 continued and reported, “We start with reading. And then after reading, we ask them to do research related, just topic research.”

Overall, strategies instructors utilized while teaching writing included providing frequent feedback, encouraging students, and improving reading skills. They believed that those techniques positively affected their students' writing and helped to improve their skills when studying in the Foundation program.

4.4.1. Suggestions: Students' perceptions.

Figure 8

Suggestions to improve the writing from students' perception



All of the students mentioned that they got oral and written feedback regularly; they

received feedback on ideas, organization, conclusion, topic sentences, grammar, and vocabulary.

Student 9 claimed:

I learned the importance of academic vocabulary in writing in the first session. In the second session, I learned that I need to write more complex sentences and pay attention to the structure of the sentences. I learned how to use conjunctions. Then I learned how to paraphrase effectively after the teacher's feedback."

Two students stated that the instructor underlined the mistakes and added correct examples. One of them, Student 8 reported, "Yes, the teacher always gave us feedback by explaining which phrases to use in some parts of our essays and how to use synonyms by avoiding repetition."

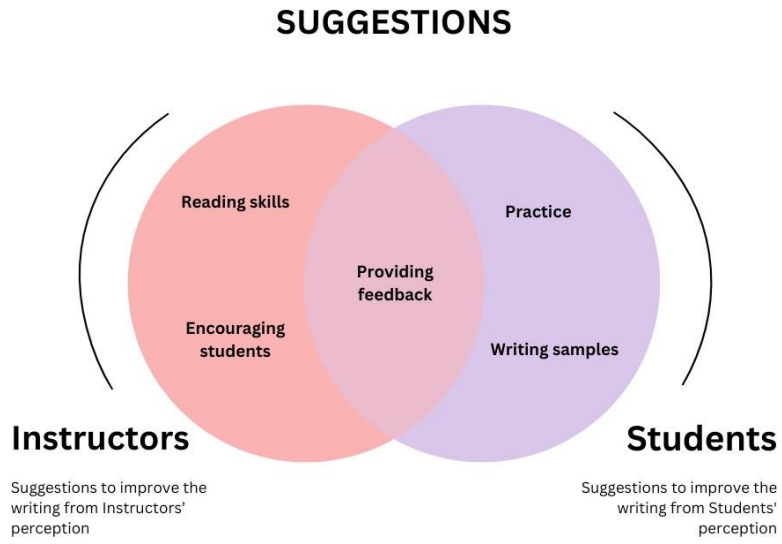
However, Student 4 emphasized, "Sometimes instructors show our mistakes, but they don't show the right form. It would be better if they noted the correct version."

In the second focus group interview, three students added that the reason behind their progress was practising writing a lot. One student pointed out that time management was a problem; however, they got used to it by practising writing. Two students believed that the writing examples provided in class helped them improve their writing practice. Given that Student 6 elaborated, "We have a lot of examples to see and to learn how to write and how to develop this writing."

Altogether, according to students, practising writing and becoming familiar with samples, and receiving feedback on their writing tasks helped them to manage time better, improve their writing and work on their mistakes.

Figure 9

Perceptions of instructors and students: Suggestions



Chapter 5. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that both instructors and students considered coherence and cohesion, finding ideas, grammar, and lack of academic vocabulary as the main challenges to performing well in writing. The interviewed instructors claimed that grammar was the most common difficulty that students faced. However, the interviewed students mentioned that the most challenging part of writing was finding ideas to produce a text. Coherence, cohesion, and lack of vocabulary were other challenges listed by both instructors and students. Based on data analysis, the findings of the Capstone project are compatible with the issues highlighted in the literature (Al Badi, 2015; Fareed & Ashraf, 2016; Pineteh, 2013; Afrin, 2016; Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Aldabbus, 2017; Kirmizi & Karci, 2017; Kirkgoz, 2010; Polat, 2018; Alfaki, 2015; Khan & Akter, 2011).

The majority of instructors complained that although students took language use classes, they struggled to apply the grammar structures in their writings. On the contrary, students did not find writing difficult for them to perform well in writing. The reviewed literature concludes that inappropriate use of articles, punctuation, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, spelling, capitalization, and verb tense are the common challenges of students in writing (Polat, 2018; Fareed & Ashraf, 2016; Aldabbus, 2017; Izzo, 1999; Al Fadda, 2012).

Another common challenge that students encountered was a lack of academic vocabulary.

Instructors mentioned that students did not have enough lexicon and could not choose the right words to express their ideas in a specific context. Likewise, students expressed that they lacked academic vocabulary, and they usually translated words from their native language into the English language. In this case, the translation of those words was not always accurate.

Compatible with the capstone project findings, several researchers also found that insufficient linguistic proficiency of students hindered them from producing quality written work (Kirkgoz, 2010; Rico, 2014; Pineteh, 2013).

Moreover, the study showed that instructors considered poor background knowledge as the main contributing factor to poor writing results of students. Most instructors were not interested in teaching writing at schools; therefore, students missed essential writing skills and techniques. Reviewed literature also found that students lacked background knowledge regarding writing since they usually learned their native language at school and passed exams by memorizing rather than acquiring the language (Pineteh, 2013; Afrin, 2016; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). On the contrary, the interviewed students thought that the main reason for their failure was not having enough ideas to write. They believed their struggles in finding ideas were because of reading less and lacking a worldview. In relation to this study's results, Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) discussed the problem of finding ideas regarding an assigned topic while Al Badi (2015) discoursed the difficulty of finding relevant topics and sources to write for students.

Furthermore, instructors stated that lack of motivation also contributed to poor writing results of students. The main complaint of instructors was that students completed the tasks only when they were graded. In line with this study's findings, Cai (2013) explored that students were not intrinsically motivated to write, leading to poor writing results.

Not having enough time for writing in exams was another issue claimed by students. They thought that time given for writing during exams was not enough for finding ideas, relevant vocabulary, and organizing their writing, which eventually affected their exam results.

Accordingly, Quantum and Chakraverty (2000) emphasized giving students enough time to brainstorm and organize their ideas.

In reviewed literature, teachers' methodologies, such as outdated teaching styles, ineffective teaching methods, and lack of constructive feedback, were considered one of the main hindrances to the quality of writing (Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). Interestingly, most of the interviewed students mentioned the benefits of instructors' feedback to improve their writing.

Despite the mentioned challenges, most students stated that the Foundation program was helpful for them to acquire writing skills, and instructors were supportive during their foundation year.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This study investigated issues concerning students in writing and contributing factors to those issues from the perspective of writing instructors and students. Furthermore, the study results aimed to provide recommendations and suggestions for assisting the learning and teaching of writing. Those recommendations were compiled into one document and formulated based on the literature review and findings.

Preliminary data and literature review revealed similar issues and factors in learning and teaching writing. Those issues included grammar, word stock, absence of ideas and organization, and contributing factors that were environmental and student-related. Data collected from semi-structured and focus interviews indicated that students were challenged because of the above-mentioned issues. In the interview protocols, questions about techniques for teaching writing effectively were asked. Students and instructors suggested that frequent feedback, motivation, and reading and writing samples would increase positive results in writing. As a result, a research question was answered. Considering the research findings, the final product was designed to provide learners with techniques for brainstorming ideas and providing feedback to peers.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Consent Form for Instructors

Consent to take part in research on Foundational Program Students' Writing: Issues, Contributing Factors, and Suggestions

Researchers: Aytaj Guliyeva, Fatima Korogluyeva, Leyla Akhundova, Maleyka Ibrahimzada

I accept to take part in this research project. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequence. I understand that I have two weeks following the interview to withdraw consent to use data from my interview, in which case the content will be erased. I was given written explanations of the study's objective and nature, and I was given the opportunity to ask questions concerning the research. I understand that participating in this research entails conducting interviews and answering questions on the research topic. I understand that participation in this research will provide no immediate advantage to me. I consent to having my interview taped. I accept that all information I provide for this study will be kept private. I understand that my identify will be kept anonymous in any report based on the findings of this study. This will be accomplished by altering my name and concealing any information about my interview. I realize that the researchers will keep signed consent forms and original audio recordings until the dissertation results are confirmed. I realize that researchers will keep a transcript of my interview with all identifying information erased for around 5 months until the dissertation results are confirmed.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially. I understand that my identity will remain anonymous in any report on the results of this research. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any

details of my interview. I understand that researchers will retain signed consent forms and original audio recordings until the results of the dissertation are confirmed. I understand that researchers will retain a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed for about 5 months until the results of the dissertation are confirmed. I realize that under the law of freedom of information, I have the legal right to access the information I have submitted at any time.

If you require further information on the research, please feel free to contact **Dr Yunusova, the Capstone Project supervisor**, via e-mail at vyunusova@ada.edu.az or by phone (012) 437 32 35 ext (476).

Signature of Participant

Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix B

Consent Form for Students

Researchers: Aytaj Guliyeva, Fatima Koroghlujeva, Leyla Akhundova, Maleyka Ibrahimzada

Academic advisor: Dr. Vafa Yunusova

Email: aguliyeva14883@ada.edu.az

Purpose

This study investigates the students' perceptions on Foundation students' writing: issues, contributing factors and suggestions. As part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group and answer structured, open-ended questions. This interview will take 60 minutes.

Participants' Rights

I accept that only the researcher will have access to my responses. When the results are released, no one will be able to identify me, and my name will not appear anywhere in the written report.

I also realize that I have the option of skipping any questions or tasks that I do not want to answer or complete. I may opt not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. I accept to have my oral responses tape-recorded and transcribed for future research. The tape recordings will be erased after transcribing. I am aware that I am taking part in a research of my own free will.

Consent to Participate

I acknowledge that my participation is entirely voluntary.

If you require further information on the research, please feel free to contact **Dr Yunusova, the Capstone Project supervisor**, via e-mail at vyunusova@ada.edu.az or by phone at (012) 437 32

35.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date:

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Protocol for Students

1. Tell me about your experience in the Foundation program, especially about learning to write.
2. How often do you practice writing?
3. What writing assignments do you do/complete in your writing classes in the Foundation program? Be specific and provide a few examples.
4. What writing skills have you developed already? Be specific and name a few writing skills.
5. How do you find writing? Is it easy or difficult? If difficult, then why? What are your main problems/difficulties in writing? Name at least three of them.
6. What are the reasons for students' poor writing? Name at least three of them.
7. Are you satisfied with your Writing instructor and, in general, with the learning to write? If yes, why? Be specific and provide examples. If not, be specific and provide examples.
8. Does your writing instructor provide feedback on your writing? If yes, how? Does your Writing instructor provide oral or written feedback? Be specific and provide three strategies for giving feedback.
9. What types of mistakes do your writing instructors usually focus on when providing feedback?
10. How useful is your writing instructor's feedback in improving your writing? What else do you want to see in your writing instructor's feedback?
11. What factors can contribute to students' poor writing? Be specific and name at least three of them.
12. What factors are your greatest hindrance to writing?
13. How can you improve your writing? Name at least three strategies that can assist you in improving your writing.

14. Do you think when you finish the Foundation program, you will be ready to transition to the first year of the General education program? If so, why? What is the rationale? Be specific.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol for Instructors

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. The name of the program that you are working in. What is your job title?
3. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
4. Can you tell me about the writing course students should take during the foundation year?
5. What writing assignments do students in the Foundation program complete? Be specific and provide a few examples.
6. What do you think of students' writing development this semester?
7. What writing skills have your students developed already? Be specific and name a few writing skills.
8. How do you monitor students' progress in writing?
9. What is your students' greatest hindrance to writing?
10. What are some of the common challenges in students' writing? Be specific and name at least three of them.
11. How do you identify learners with barriers to writing? What are these barriers? Be specific and provide examples.
12. What are the reasons for students' poor writing? Name at least three of them.
13. What factors affect students' writing? And how do you overcome them?
14. Why is feedback important for students' writing?
15. How do you provide feedback on your students' writing? Do you provide oral or written feedback? Be specific and name at least three strategies.
16. What are the main issues that you focus on when giving feedback?
17. Do you think students finishing the Foundation program are ready to transition to the first year of the General education program? If so, why? What is the rationale? Be specific.

18. How best could you and your department be involved in improving students' writing skills?

Appendix E

Parental Consent Form

Researchers: Aytaj Guliyeva, Fatima Koroghlyeva, Leyla Akhundova, Maleyka Ibrahimzada

Academic advisor: Dr Vafa Yunusova

Introduction

- This form's objective is to give you—as the parent of a potential research study participant—information that could influence your decision about allowing your child to participate in this study.
- Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission for your child to take part.
- If you decide to let your child be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission

Purpose

- This study investigates the students' perceptions of Foundation students' writing: issues, contributing factors and suggestions.
- As part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group and answer structured, open-ended questions.
- If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to participate in the focus group interview.
- They will answer questions related to their experience in writing courses they are taking in the foundation program.
- This interview will last 45-60 minutes, and the capstone project members will be in the interview.
- If you decide to take part in the study, your kid will be audio recorded. The research team will be the only ones with access to any audio or video recordings, which will be stored securely.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. You can let your child participate in this study and withdraw them from the interview at any point.

Moreover, your child must agree to participate in the study. The research will not include your child if they refuse to participate. If your child initially agrees to be in the study, they can change their mind later and withdraw anytime.

If you require further information on the research, please feel free to contact Dr Yunusova, the Capstone Project supervisor, via e-mail at vyunusova@ada.edu.az or by phone at (012) 437 32 35.

Signature

You are deciding to allow your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- After reading the information above, you've decided to let them participate in the research.
- You have the right to end your child's participation in the research at any time if you afterwards decide that you no longer want them to participate.
- A copy of this document will be given to you.

Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

Date __/__/____

Signature of Researcher

Date __/__/____

Appendix F

İcazə Məktubu

Tədqiqatçılar: Aytac Quliyeva, Fatima Koroğluyeva, Leyla Axundova, Məleykə İbrahimzadə

Akademik məsləhətçi: Dr.Vəfa Yunusova

Giriş

- Bu formanın məqsədi, potensial tədqiqat iştirakçısının valideyni kimi, uşağınızın bu tədqiqatda iştirakına icazə vermək barədə qərarınıza təsir edə biləcək məlumat verməkdir.
- Aşağıdakı məlumatı oxuyun və uşağınızın iştirakına icazə verib-verməməyə qərar verməzdən əvvəl suallarınızı verin.
- Əgər uşağınızın bu tədqiqata cəlb edilməsinə icazə vermək qərarına gəlsəniz, bu forma icazənizi qeyd etmək üçün istifadə olunacaq

Məqsəd

- Bu tədqiqat Foundation tələbələrinin yazı bacarıqlarını araşdırır.
- Bu araşdırmanın bir hissəsi olaraq sizdən fokus qrupda iştirak etmək və strukturlaşdırılmış, açıq suallara cavab vermək istəniləcək.
- Əgər uşağınızın bu araşdırmada iştirakına icazə versəniz, onlardan fokus qrup müsahibəsində iştirak etmələri xahiş olunacaq.
- Bu müsahibə 45-60 dəqiqə davam edəcək və capstone layihəsinin üzvləri müsahibədə olacaqlar.
- Tədqiqatda iştirak etmək qərarına gəlsəniz, uşağınızın səsi yazılacaq. Tədqiqat qrupu təhlükəsiz şəkildə saxlanılacaq istənilən audio və ya video yazıya çıxışı olan yeganə şəxslər olacaq.

Uşağınızın bu araşdırmada iştirakı könüllüdür. Uşağınız istənilən vaxt iştirakdan imtina edə və ya iştirakdan imtina edə bilər. Uşağınızın bu araşdırmada iştirakına icazə verə və istənilən vaxt onu müsahibədən çıxara bilərsiniz.

Üstəlik, uşağınız tədqiqatda iştirak etməyə razı olmalıdır. Uşağınız iştirak etməkdən imtina edərsə, tədqiqata daxil edilməyəcək. Əgər uşağınız əvvəlcə tədqiqatda iştirak etməyə razıdırsa, o, sonradan fikrini dəyişə və istənilən vaxt geri çəkilə bilər.

Tədqiqatla bağlı əlavə məlumat ehtiyacınız varsa, lütfən, Capstone Layihəsinin rəhbəri Dr Yunusova ilə vyunusova@ada.edu.az elektron poçt ünvanı və ya (012) 437 32 35 telefon nömrəsi ilə əlaqə saxlayın.

İmza

Siz uşağınızın bu tədqiqatda iştirakına icazə vermək qərarına gəlirsiniz. Aşağıdakı imzanız bunu göstərir:

- Yuxarıdakı məlumatları oxuduqdan sonra siz onların tədqiqatda iştirakına icazə vermək qərarına gəldiniz.

- Əgər sonradan onun daha iştirakını istəmədiyinizə qərar versəniz, istənilən vaxt övladınızın tədqiqatda iştirakını dayandırmaq hüququnuz var.

- Bu sənədin surəti sizə veriləcək.

Valideyn(lər)in və ya qanuni qəyyumun imzası Tarix __/__/____

Tədqiqatçının İmzası Tarix __/__/____

Appendix G

Utilising Techniques for Brainstorming Ideas and Providing Peer Feedback

Capstone project:
Foundation Program Students' Writing: Issues,
Contributing Factors, and Suggestions

Students:
Aytaj Guliyeva, Fatima Koroghlyeva,
Maleyka Ibrahimzade, Leyla Akhundova

Instructor and Supervisor:
Dr. Vafa Yunusova

Date:
June, 2023



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➤ Aim and Objectives



To address foundation program retake students' challenges in writing

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to

- ▶ apply "lists and bullets" brainstorming technique while producing writing
- ▶ practice a paragraph writing
- ▶ use "Sandwich Model" for providing feedback to their peers

➤ Details



Target Group

Retake students at ADA
University



Duration

2 hours and a half
+ 15 minutes (break)



Venue

ADA University



Introduction

"Get to know" activity - 15 minutes

Name tag

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- Take a name tag and a pencil.
- Leave gaps for the letters of your name on it.
- Mingle with a random person in the room and ask for his/her name.
- If your names have the same letter/s, write down it/them.
- Continue asking names to fill in all the gaps.
- Once your name is complete, take your seats.

Brainstorming Activity



Lists and Bullets

- Form a circle - 3 minutes .
- Name yourselves in turn as lemon, orange, apple, and plum.
- Form four groups according to the names of fruits.
- Take a flipchart and markers.
- Brainstorm the topic "impact of internet in education".
- Write down brainstormed ideas on flipchart - 8 minutes.
- Time is up and rotate flipcharts clockwise to the next group.
- Add your ideas to "your new flipchart" and do not add the same ideas.
- You will rotate flipcharts till you receive your own - 24 minutes.

Retrieved from nonprofitcopywriter.com

Group Work - 35 minutes



Paragraph Writing

20 minutes

Paragraph Writing

- Presenting elements of the paragraph.
- Displaying a sample paragraph to explain its structure.

Online Quiz

- <https://jeopardylabs.com/>

A SAMPLE PARAGRAPH

Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. Therefore, it is suitable for jewellery, coins, and ornamental purposes. Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was made 25 centuries ago. Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications, such as photography and dentistry. The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection when they go outside spaceships in space. In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

Retrieved from Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (1982a). Writing academic English. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA759273IX>

Topic Sentence

A topic sentence is the most general statement in the paragraph because it gives only the main idea. It does not give any specific details.

Supporting Sentences

Supporting sentences explain or prove the topic sentence.

Concluding the paragraph

signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember.

(Giltrow, 2002)



BREAK TIME - 15 MINUTES

Individual Practice

Topic: Impact of Internet on Education

Allocated time - 20 minutes

- Write a paragraph individually
- Use previously brainstormed ideas





Pair Work

Time - 15 minutes

- Read your pair's paragraph.
- Review and evaluate it according to the rubric.

Peer Review and Evaluation

Categories of Performance	Proficient 4	Intermediate 3 - 2	Basic 1
Topic sentence/ main idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear topic sentence - Correctly placed - Restated in conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic sentence is complete. - The main idea is clearly stated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic sentence is poorly written. - The main idea is not entirely clear.
Body/supporting sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent development of main idea. - Creates interest through details - Varied sentence structures are used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body contains 3 + sentences - Mostly related details - Sentences are complete and focused. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited details to establish interest in topic interest in the topic. - Short/choppy sentences that lack flow
Concluding sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sentence is complete - Restates the main idea effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sentence is nearly complete - It almost sums up paragraph. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sentence is incomplete - Does not sum up the paragraph
Organization/fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well organized with clear topic, body, and conclusion. - Flows logically - Consistent focus on topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate choice of words - More attention needed to create fluency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited details. - Shows effort to create order using simple language to express ideas.
Mechanics/Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. - Uses descriptive language - Neat final draft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less than 5 errors in spelling and grammar. - Shows variety of words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than 5 errors in spelling and grammar. - Words not always used correctly.

Total: 20

Adapted from: https://saskliteracy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CircleOfLearning_rubric_for_well_written_paragraph.pdf



Pair Work

Time - 15 minutes

- Provide oral feedback to your pair by using Sandwich Model.

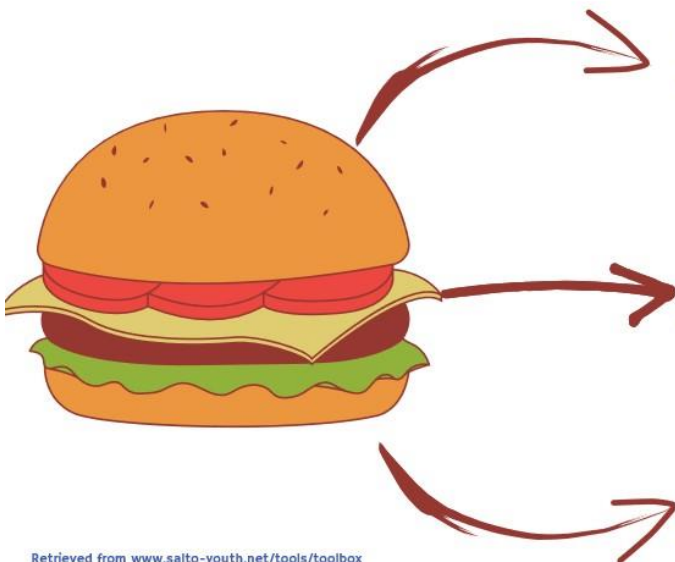
Peer Feedback

Sandwich Model for Providing Peer Feedback

What is good?
Positive Feedback

What can be improved?
Areas for improvement

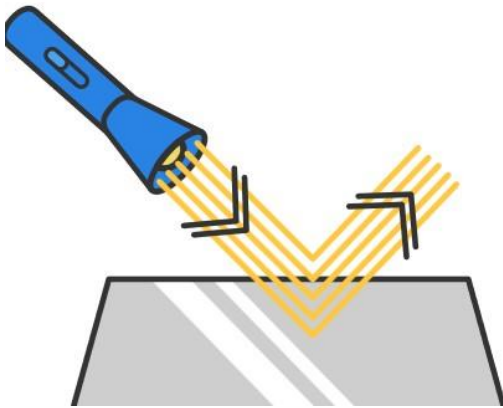
What is good?
Positive Feedback



Wrap - Up & Reflection - 15 minutes

Participants go to [menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and answer open-ended questions or use pen and paper.

- What did you know?
- What have you learned?
- How will you apply gained knowledge in your future studies?



References

SALTO-YOUTH - Toolbox - Tool for youth work and projects - or recruit participants. (n.d.).

<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox>

Giltrow, J. (2002). *Academic Writing: An Introduction*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB03221765>

Word Wise Tips: Welcome to Nonprofit Copywriter home. (n.d.). Nonprofit Copywriter.

<https://nonprofitcopywriter.com/>



**Thank you for
your attention!!!**

