

The Benefits of “Academic Writing” Course for the Freshmen in English-Medium-Instruction Departments in a Turkish State University

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Abstract: The importance of academic writing is prevalent especially for the students taking English-medium instruction (EMI). After the intensive language lessons in the School of Foreign Languages, students must reach a certain level (B2) in order to pursue their academic studies in English. In addition to their departmental courses, freshmen in some EMI departments are offered “Academic Writing” course while some others do not have this opportunity. Thus, this study has tried to determine the efficiency and the benefits of this course for the freshmen in this university. For the purpose of the study, 5 freshmen that took “Academic Writing” course in the spring semester and 6 other freshmen who were not offered this course were assigned to write an academic essay on a given topic by the researcher. After the submission of their papers, the researcher had semi-structured interviews with each participant. Data were analyzed qualitatively via manual coding. It was found that the students who took “Academic Writing” course were more successful than their peers who were not given this opportunity in terms of grammar and vocabulary knowledge as well as the content formation in their academic papers.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Freshmen, English-Medium-Instruction, EFL Context, Higher Education, Language Teaching

Bir Türk Devlet Üniversitesindeki İngilizce Eğitim Verilen Bölümlerdeki Birinci Sınıf Öğrencilerine Sunulan “Akademik Yazım” Dersinin Faydaları

Öz: Akademik yazmanın önemi, özellikle İngilizce eğitim alan öğrencilerin bölüm dersleri için açıktır. Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu’ndaki yoğun dil derslerinin ardından, bu öğrenciler İngilizce akademik çalışmalarını sürdürebilmeleri için belirli bir düzeye (B2) gelmek zorundadır. Bölüm derslerine ek olarak, İngilizce eğitim veren bazı bölümlerdeki birinci sınıf öğrencilerine “Akademik Yazım” dersi verilirken, bazıları bu fırsata sahip değildir. Böylelikle bu çalışma, bu dersin üniversite birinci sınıf öğrencilerine kazandırdığı etkinlik ve faydaları belirlemeye çalışmıştır. Araştırmanın amacı doğrultusunda, bahar döneminde “Akademik Yazım” dersini alan 5 birinci sınıf öğrencisi ve bu dersi almayan diğer 6 birinci sınıf öğrencisi, araştırmacı tarafından verilen bir konuda akademik bir makale yazmaları için görevlendirilmiştir. Araştırmacı, makalelerin gönderilmesinden sonra her katılımcıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapmıştır. Veriler manuel kodlama yoluyla nitel şekilde analiz edilmiştir. “Akademik Yazım” dersini alan öğrencilerin, akademik makalelerindeki içerik oluşumunun yanı sıra gramer ve kelime bilgisi bilgileri açısından da bu dersi almayan akranlarına göre daha başarılı olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Akademik Yazım, Birinci Sınıf Üniversite Öğrencileri, İngilizce Verilen Eğitim, İngilizce’nin Yabancı Dil Olarak Kullanıldığı Bağlam, Yükseköğretim, Dil Öğretimi

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Writing is one of the language skills used not only for the academic purposes such as preparing research paper but also for other real-life skills such as film-reviewing, blogging, and e-mailing (Polio & Park, 2016). What is more, Cole and Feng (2015) claim that “writing is the skill which students find the most challenging and are least proficient in while acquiring a language” (p.3). Therefore, there are some variables that affect learners to become successful L2 writers (Cumming, 2001). Table 1 shows the factors that must be thought in teaching writing.

Table 1. *Factors that affect writing*

Orientations		
Text-focused	Process-focused	Sociocultural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Orthography ✓ Morphology ✓ Lexicon ✓ Syntax ✓ The discourse and theoretical conventions of the L2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Macro strategies • Planning • Drafting • Revising ✓ Micro strategies • Attending to content and form concurrently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Genres ✓ Values ✓ Practices

The categorization in Table 1 was made by Cummings (2001) emphasizes that there are different variables to consider for a successful writing. Therefore, this may shed a light on the factors that teachers have to take into consideration while teaching writing to their students.

Teaching Writing

Rao (2019) stresses the role of the teacher in terms of teaching writing by stating:

Learners will face problems with writing but it is teacher’s responsibility to overcome them. With tasks, in-class activities, content choice and finding out the interest of students are the keys for effective writing teaching. Teachers have to think innovatively to make learners motivated towards writing (p. 202).

In his article, Rao (2019) emphasizes the importance of “good coherence” and “proper organization” of the essay. Hence, students must do a lot of practice to make accurate and proper sentences, which makes it easier for them to write coherent paragraphs in terms of sequencing of different perspectives.

Hussain (2017) claims that “learning writing has been regarded as a complex activity to teach L2 to the students using a single approach” (p.220). Thus, he suggests “brainstorming” as the most efficient way to teach writing and this was also confirmed by the participants of his study. Graham (2019) comes up with some other factors that affect the quality of effective writing teaching such as time, composition of classrooms, teachers’ knowledge and belief, proper writing instructions, records of students. Barkaoui (2007) states the importance of the role of teachers in teaching writing as they are expected to motivate and encourage their learners to write and give quality feedback in accordance with their needs in the end.

As for the type of feedback given to improve the writings of the students, there are different thoughts about this. Kepner (1991) conducted a study in which two types of feedback were given to two different groups. One of them got feedback on their linguistic errors and the other got their feedback on a comment basis with a message written by the teacher. The latter group got more successful in terms of their writings. However, it is also stated in Rose’s study (1983) that the writing topic of the learners must be challenging enough for the students to have a tendency to make errors from which they would learn a lot to improve their writing skills.

In another study conducted by Firkins et al. (2007), the importance of contextualization has been stressed. The results show that students write successfully if they are engaged with texts as pre-activities and instructions that guide them, which, in turn, will make them write properly. Therefore, it can be concluded that teaching writing also requires learners to create an appropriate content that is relevant to the essay topic, which makes it necessary for the learners to read a lot for content formation, the importance of which was emphasized as one of the significant contributors to writing performance of the students taking an online

teaching program in the study of Luna et al. (2020). Hidayati (2018) also suggests that teachers must encourage learner to read and write for an effective writing skill improvement.

The Reasons for the Weakness of Students' Writings

The teacher of the classroom who is also the assessor of the writing papers of the students plays a major role in the focus of student writings as students pay more attention to the points which are emphasized by their teacher. Clippard (1998) claims that this teacher-centered writing teaching prevents students from writing on what they are interested in, so learners concentrate more on the correction of surface-level errors. Therefore, Tan (2011) states that teacher-focused writing lecture method is unproductive so learners must be encouraged to take an active part in the process of learning academic writing.

Another reason why students cannot achieve their goals in terms of writing development is that the product-focused approach is given more importance in writing classes than the process of making the product (Stapa & Abdul-Majid, 2009). Therefore, students focus more on the end product instead of the process in which they will learn a lot in terms of their academic writing skill.

The number of students in classes is another important factor that has a great effect on learners' success in the writing skill development. Warschauer and Ware (2006) state that the more students teachers have in their classes, the less time they will be able to allocate to each student and his/her piece of work. Thus, there must be a limited number of students for the writing classes in order to increase the efficiency of the lessons.

The lack of practice is also another issue that leads to weakness in the writing skills of the learners. McGarthey et.al (2004) elaborate on why writings of students are not getting developed. They claim that it is due to the absence of the encouragement from the teachers as students are not fostered enough to write by their teachers. Besides, a recent study done by McGlynn and Kelly (2019) demonstrates that students get better scores in writing when they are given more opportunity to write.

In another comprehensive study conducted by Hidayati (2018), interviews were held with different Indonesian English language teachers who come from different parts of Indonesia and teach in either public or private senior and junior high schools, and they were asked about the challenges of writing, which were divided into two: internal factors (English competence, native language interference, motivation and reading habit) and external factors (class condition, availability of aids, availability of time). Hidayati (2018) states that English competence of the learners is one of the most significant variables that affects their writing skills.

In the studies conducted in Turkish context, it has been found that students' writing anxieties mostly stem from time restrictions and the way they are evaluated and given feedback (Kırmızı & Kırmızı, 2015). Other studies conducted in higher education level also show that students have some difficulty in content formation for their writings (Atay & Kurt, 2006; Kurt & Atay, 2007).

The Significance of The Study

Because of the pandemic caused by coronavirus (Covid-19) all around the world, the courses had been offered online in universities since the middle of the spring term in 2020. Wijeyewardene et al. (2013) claim that though online writing teaching has some drawbacks such as the lack of the intimacy of face-to-face education, students' level of computer literacy, self-direction, work commitments, the scarcity of feedback, lack of opportunities, it can be beneficial with the use of online discussion, forum, Edmodo, Turnitin, all of which facilitate both basic writing skills including paragraphs, sentences, grammar as well as writing refinements like editing and proof-reading in addition to the instruction and feedback. Arlina and Melor (2015) show the benefits of the integration of technology with academic writing improvement of the students. It has been shown in their study that mobile assisted language learning (MALL) will facilitate the academic writing skills of the learners with the combination of different approaches so that students will have the chance to acquire the knowledge from different technological sources. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether the "Academic Writing" course serves the needs of the learners who are taking English-medium instruction (EMI) in their faculties and departments and here are the research questions of this study:

How have the learners taking English-medium-instruction acquired their academic writing skills?

- Do they find it satisfactory to meet their needs in their academic studies?
- Do their writing skills serve their needs for their departmental courses?

How does “the academic writing” course offered for the freshmen who take English medium instruction help them?

- In what ways do they benefit from it?

What are the deficiencies of these learners as for their academic writing skills?

Method

Research Design

This study was planned as action research because the researcher was the one who designed this research in his own teaching and researching context as Burns (2010) defines “action research” as “a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts” because “a teacher becomes an ‘investigator’ or ‘explorer’ of his or her personal teaching context, while at the same time being one of the participants in it” (p.2). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher acted as an “on-site” observer in the research context where he was working as one of the academics who knew a lot about the institution because he was one of the lecturers offering the “Academic Writing” course, the efficiency of which was evaluated in terms of the academic skills of the learners in that university. Action research must be conducted by a researcher who must be actively working withing the research context with which s/he has to be familiar in every aspect that will be investigated with the study which requires the researcher to be “participatory” so that there will be an improvement in his/her teaching context (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992). In this study, the researcher tried to determine the efficiency of an academic course offered to students who were taking English-medium-instruction in a certain context. According to another definition made by Zuber-Skerritt (1996b) “action research” must be “critical (and self-critical) collaborative inquiry by reflective practitioners being accountable and making results of their enquiry public self-evaluating their practice and engaged in participatory problem-solving and continuing professional development” (p.85).

Study Group

This study was carried out with the students who were freshmen in their departments which provide English-medium-instruction in one of the state universities in Istanbul, Turkey. The participants of this study had had a preparatory year when they were taught academic English language skills in the previous year of the study in the School of Foreign Languages, the mission of which is to prepare the students for the academic studies that they have to pursue in departments and faculties providing English-medium-instruction. Therefore, it can be claimed that all of these participants took a preparatory year when they took an intensive language education just before they started to take their courses in their faculties. However, the participants were categorized into two groups as the ones who were taking “Academic Writing” course at the time of the study and the ones who were not offered “Academic Writing” course in the first year in their departments. Thus, the ones who were taking the course were coded as “AWCS” (Academic Writing Course Students) while the ones who were not given the course were named as “NCS” (No Course Students). Here is the table that shows the demographic information of the participant students.

Table 2. Demographic information of the participants

Codes	Age	High School graduation	Hometown	Department	Prep year in high school
AWCS1	19	Anatolian High School	Ankara	Psychology	No
AWCS2	21	Anatolian Teacher Training High School	Mardin	Psychology	Yes
AWCS3	38	Anatolian Religious High School	Istanbul	Psychology	No

AWCS4	21	Anatolian High School	Sakarya	Psychology	No
AWCS5	19	Anatolian High School	İstanbul	Psychology	No
NCS1	21	Anatolian Social Science High School	Edirne	International Relations	Yes
NCS2	19	Anatolian Girls' Religious High School	İzmit	Theology	No
NCS3	21	Anatolian High School	Istanbul	Environmental engineering	No
NCS4	20	Anatolian High School	İzmit	Business Administration	No
NCS5	21	Anatolian High School	İzmit	Material and Metallurgy Engineering	No
NCS6	20	Anatolian High School	Eskişehir	Business Administration	No

As it can be seen on Table 2 that all the participants in the "AWCS" group were in the department of "Psychology" which provides English-medium-instruction in the Faculty of Arts and Science in the university whereas the students in "NCS" group were from different departments in different faculties because the latter were chosen among the ones who were not given the "Academic Writing" course in their first year in their departments. What is more, there was one student from each group who took a prep year in high school education: AWCS2 and NCS1. It was also significant to note that all of the participants were chosen taking their consent to contribute to the study.

Another important point to note here was that the "Academic Writing" course, for which this study was conducted, was offered to the freshmen in some faculties which provide English medium instruction like the Faculty of Science and Arts and Faculty of Law in the spring semester. However, this course was not offered in faculties like Political Science, Engineering and Business Administration even though they provide English medium instruction, as well. Thus, these two different applications in different faculties were taken in the scope of this study to determine the efficiency of both.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected with the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Institution of Education Sciences in Marmara University. As for the details of the approval, Ethics Committee's decision was given on 5th April 2021 and Ethics Committee approval issue number was 3-43.

Data Collection Tools

For the purpose of this study, two data collection tools were used: student essays and interviews.

Student Essays

All the participant students were assigned to write a well-organized essay on "the causes and effects of 'success in an IELTS test'". They were told to write their essays within 50 minutes as if they were taking a real test. These essays were sent to the researcher for the analysis because these were considered as the source that showed their level of knowledge in terms of their academic writing skills.

Interviews

Each participant student was interviewed by the researcher individually. The interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the both participants and researcher so that they would feel more comfortable to express themselves about the issue. Every interview took around 35 minutes (5 minutes more or less). The interviews were held online on Zoom and they were recorded with the consent of the participants for the researcher to transcribe them for later analysis.

The interview questions which were written by the researcher considering the research questions were semi-structured because students were made to make comments on the point specifically asked to them considering the research questions. Gall et al. (2003) point out that the interviews must not be too restricted not prevent the participants from sharing what they would like to say about the issue as for the qualitative research.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was organized according to the principles of an action research design put forward by Zuber-Skerritt (1996a). First of all, the researcher made a plan for his action research as he thought that it was necessary to determine the efficiency of the course named as “Academic Writing”, offered to the English-medium-instruction departments. After this “strategic planning”, he started to take an “action”. During this phase of the research, he chose the participants who were willing to take part in this study from different departments categorizing them as the ones who got “Academic Writing” course and the one who did not. He assigned the participants to write a well-organized essay on “the causes and effects of ‘success in an IELTS test’”. As the objectives of an academic essay writing in a “well-organized” way was taught in the class where this action research was conducted, students were already familiar with the objectives of the course as well as the expectations of the researcher in terms of the way they would write. Right after the submission of the essays by the participant students to the researcher, he conducted interviews with them. In the second part of the interviews, the researcher moved to the third stage of the research which was “evaluation” because he evaluated the writing performance of the participant students over the essays sent to them together with the interviewees showing their mistakes and recognizing the deficiencies of the learners. At this stage, both the students and the researcher made self-evaluation in terms of learning and teaching writing, respectively. At the final “reflection” stage of the research, the researcher started to make some reflections of the efficiency of the course offered to those students taking all the first three stages into account.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was made in accordance with the research questions stated above. As this was action research in which qualitative data collection tools were used, Cohen et al. (2007) state that “analysis here is almost inevitably interpretive” (p.469). With this regard, the data was analyzed “in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied” (Gall et al., 2003; p. 453). Thus, the transcriptions of the recordings of interviews were needed. The essays written by the participant students were already ready for the analysis. After the deep analysis of the transcriptions of the interviews, the researcher classified and categorized the data considering the research questions so that he would find the right themes out of them (Krippendorp, 2004). Cohen et al. (2007) define categories as “the main groupings of constructs or key features of the text, showing links between units of analysis” (p. 478). They also define codes as “the smallest element of material that can be analysed” (p. 477). The codes concluded from the data of this study were descriptive and “situational” because they reflected the perspectives of the participants and their way of thinking about the questions asked to them (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Consequently, the codes were thematically categorized concerning the research questions.

Some of the quotes from what the participant students mentioned during the interviews were also given in the results section as Gall et al. (2003) claim that “direct quotes of the remarks by the case study participants were particularly effective because they clarify the emic perspective, that is, the meaning of the phenomenon from the point of view of the participants” (p. 469). These quotes made it much clearer for the reader to understand the context of the study.

The student essays were evaluated by the researcher considering the following criteria: task achievement, grammatical range, lexical range, cohesion and organization. Each paper was assessed by the researcher and shown to each correspondent participant to make them realize the mistakes that they made.

As this is a contextual case study designed as an “action research”, the results cannot be generalized for other contexts.

Results

The Backgrounds of The Participants in Terms of Their Writing Skills

As all of the participant students had had a prep year before they started to take their departmental courses, they were asked whether they had been satisfied with the language education they got from their

prep school and in what ways the prep year contributed to their language skills. Here is the table that shows the backgrounds of language learning process of the learners in the prep school.

Table 3. *The satisfaction of learners as well as the skills they highly developed in prep school*

Codes	The satisfaction from the prep school	The skills that they mostly developed in prep school
AWCS1	Yes	Academic writing, grammar
AWCS2	Yes	Academic writing, grammar
AWCS3	Yes	Academic writing, vocabulary, grammar
AWCS4	Yes	Academic writing, grammar
AWCS5	Yes	Academic writing, grammar
NCS1	Yes	Academic writing, vocabulary, grammar
NCS2	Yes	Academic writing, grammar
NCS3	Yes	Academic writing, grammar
NCS4	Yes	Academic writing, vocabulary, grammar
NCS5	Yes	Academic writing, vocabulary
NCS6	Yes	Academic writing, vocabulary

Table 3 above proved that the participant students mostly benefitted from their prep school year in terms of their writing skills so it could be claimed that they learned how to write academically in their prep school. NCS1 explained the situation;

"Though I got a prep year at the beginning of my high school, I was not taught how to write academically there. In fact, I realized in the prep school in university that there was a format and the way that had to follow in order to write an academic paper in English."

This quote showed the importance given to academic writing skill development in the prep school of the university where this study was conducted. What is more, all the participants stated that they found the language education quite satisfactory despite the pandemic that broke out in the middle of the second term. However, they claimed that they could not improve their speaking skills to which enough attention was not given.

The Contribution of The Prep Education to The Departmental Courses

It was found that participants benefitted from their prep school education mostly in terms of academic writing and grammar. The researcher wanted to determine the contribution of the prep school education to the departmental courses of the participants. Here is the table that shows the efficiency of the language education of prep school on departmental courses considering its strengths and weaknesses.

Table 4. *The efficiency of the language education of prep school on departmental courses with its strengths and weaknesses*

Codes	Contribution of prep school to the departmental courses	Strengths	Weaknesses
AWCS1	Yes	Comprehension of the course content	Academic speaking
AWCS2	Yes	Comprehension of the course content	Academic speaking
AWCS3	Yes	Comprehension of the course content	Academic speaking
AWCS4	Yes	Comprehension of the course content	Academic speaking
AWCS5	Yes	Comprehension of the course content, project writing	Academic speaking
NCS1	Yes	Comprehension of the course content, project writing	Lack of terminology related to the department
NCS2	Yes	Comprehension of the course content, project writing	Academic speaking, lack of terminology related to the department
NCS3	Yes	Comprehension of the course content, writing reports	Academic speaking
NCS4	Yes	Comprehension of the course content	Academic speaking
NCS5	Yes	Comprehension of the course content, writing reports	Lack of terminology related to the department
NCS6	Yes	Comprehension of the course content	Lack of terminology related to the department

From Table 4, it can be understood that all the participants stated that they were able to comprehend the course content with the help of the education they got from the prep school though they added that there were some times when they found it difficult to keep up with the flow of the lessons as the lecturers spoke fast just like a native speaker. What is more, they criticized the language education in the prep school as it did not provide them with the opportunity to improve their academic speaking skills and learn more about the terminology that they had to acquire as for their departmental studies. However, NCS2 explained:

“I was not given any terms related to my department, Theology, which was impossible because there were some other students from other departments so we read texts about more general topics such as environment. Additionally; as we were much more concentrated on the exam, we did not give any importance to speaking which was not tested in the final. However, one needs to make personal efforts to improve his/her speaking ability.”

This quote showed the weaknesses of the prep education that the participants had to face when they started their departments.

The Writing Skill Requirements for Their Departmental Courses

Participants were asked whether they had any difficulty in writing academic term papers, projects or assignments and the reasons why. Here is the table that shows their responses.

Table 5. *The difficulty that learners faced in terms of academic writing for their departmental courses and the reasons*

Codes	Any difficulty with academic writing for departmental courses	Why?
AWCS1	Not at all	Internalization of it systematically
AWCS2	Not at all	Internalization of it systematically
AWCS3	Sometimes	Lack of practice and certain vocabulary
AWCS4	Not at all	Internalization of it systematically
AWCS5	Rarely	Time limit and content formation
NCS1	Not at all	Internalization of it systematically in prep school
NCS2	Usually	Lack of sentence structures, content formation, format
NCS3	Sometimes	Format
NCS4	Generally	Lack of practice, certain knowledge and vocabulary
NCS5	Sometimes	Lack of practice and vocabulary
NCS6	All the time	Lack of knowledge and vocabulary

From Table 5 above, it can be understood that the students who did not take “Academic Writing” course had some difficulty in writing academically for the assignments or term-papers for their departmental courses except from NCS1 who had a prep year in her high school whereas the ones who had taken “Academic Writing” course did not have any difficulty apart from AWCS3 who sometimes found it difficult to write due to the lack of practice and certain vocabulary.

The Benefits of “Academic Writing” Course

AWCS Group

The participant students (AWCS group) were asked whether they benefited from this course for their academic studies. All of them stated that they started to be able to express themselves better with accurate sentence structures and the right vocabulary when asked to write an academic paper in the other departmental courses that they took with the help of this course. AWCS1 elaborated on the issue:

“It is right that we have been taught academic writing in our prep year but this course provides us with more details, forms, formats and different essay types that help me improve my academic writing skills which can only be put one step forward with this course. I have also learned the organization pattern of the whole essay. To be more specific, I have acquired some sentence structures which facilitated my written expression.”

The quote shows that students taking the course learned a lot from it. This group also confirmed that they benefitted from this course a lot in that they were able to write the term papers and assignments of the other departmental courses that they had taken. AWCS2 explained:

“I have started to pay more attention to my grammar and word choices with the help of this lesson. What is more, I am aware of the significance of the linkers. Thus, I think they all make my academic paper both coherent and accurate.”

Along with the benefits of this course for the writing skills development, these learners were also asked whether this course contributed to their other language sub-skills apart from writing. Here is the table that shows their responses.

Table 6. *The developed language sub-skills with "Academic Writing" course*

The codes	The developed language skills
AWCS1	Grammar, vocabulary
AWCS2	Grammar, vocabulary
AWCS3	Vocabulary, grammar, reading
AWCS4	Grammar, reading
AWCS5	Vocabulary, grammar

It can be concluded from Table 5 that learners developed their grammar and vocabulary skills with the help of this course along with the reading skill mentioned by AWCS3 and AWCS4.

NCS Group

The other group of participants who were not taking the course (NCS) were also asked whether they would like to take it if given a chance. All of them said "yes" because it would enable them to develop their writing skills. NCS2 explained:

"I would love to take this course which would make it easier for me to write academically. Unfortunately, writing takes a lot of my time so I need to accelerate my pace. I cannot make proper sentences. They do not come to my mind easily. I have always had to have a look at the sentence structures to better make an accurate sentence which can properly reflect the ideas in my mind."

It can be noticed from the quote that the ones who were not offered to this course would love to get it due to its so many benefits.

The participants in this group added that if they had taken this course, it would have helped them acquire the skills necessary for them to write academically especially for the term papers and assignments for the other courses that they had taken in English because "Academic Writing" course would equip them with the sentence structures and format of writing that they could use in these academic papers. What is more, NCS1, NCS2, NCS4, and NCS5 stated that this course would have certainly made them much quicker to write an academic paper in a limited period of time.

These learners were asked what kind of language sub-skills they would have improved if they had taken this course except from writing. Here is the table that shows their responses.

Table 7. *The would-be developed language sub-skills if this course had been offered*

The codes	The would-be developed language skills
NCS1	Vocabulary, speaking
NCS2	Grammar, vocabulary, speaking
NCS3	Vocabulary, grammar, reading
NCS4	Grammar, vocabulary, reading
NCS5	Vocabulary, grammar, speaking
NCS6	Grammar, vocabulary

From Table 7 above it can be recognized that this group agreed with their peers in AWCS group. However, they made an addition that speaking could have improved with this course because they would learn new vocabulary and sentence structures that they could use to express themselves orally.

Deficiencies of The Learners in Terms of Academic Writing

The deficiencies of learners in terms of their academic writing were determined with the essay samples that they had submitted to the researcher as an assignment completed within 50 minutes as if they had taken a real test. After the submission during the interviews, the participants were asked about the difficulties that they faced while they were writing the assignment and the mistakes that they had made were shown to them by the researcher. Thus, in the second part of the interview, the researcher conducted the analysis of the writing paper with the interviewee who submitted it. Here is the table that shows the analysis of the writing

papers of the participants.

Table 8. *The difficulties and mistakes of the learners for the writing assignment*

Codes	Difficulty level for the participants	The reason of the difficulty	Mistakes
AWCS1	Low	The lack of some vocabulary knowledge	Word choices
AWCS2	Low	The lack of some vocabulary knowledge	Word choice, repetition, some grammar mistakes
AWCS3	Low	Time limitation	Coherence, some grammar mistakes
AWCS4	Medium	Content formation	Word choice, coherence, linkers
AWCS5	Low	Coherence and unity	Word choice
NCS1	Low	Word choice, grammar	Word form, word choice, coherence, some grammar mistakes
NCS2	High	Grammar, word choice, repetition, time limitation, lack of practice	Word form, word choice, major grammar mistakes, task achievement, repetitive use of the words
NCS3	High	Grammar, lack of practice, time limitation, repetition	Major grammar mistakes, word choice, task achievement, coherence, content formation
NCS4	Extremely High	Lack of knowledge on essay writing, grammar	Major grammar mistakes, word choice, content formation, task achievement,
NCS5	High	Lack of knowledge on essay writing, grammar, lack of vocabulary	Grammar mistakes, format of the essay, content formation, coherence, task achievement
NCS6	Extremely high	Lack of knowledge on essay writing, grammar, lack of vocabulary, time limitation	Major grammar mistakes, format of the essay, content formation, coherence, task achievement, word choice

From Table 8 above, it can be concluded that the students in NCS group who did not take the “Academic Writing” course had found it a lot more difficult to write the assignment given to them due to several reasons but the most important of all was their lack of grammar because they did not have to write as many academic papers as the ones who had taken the course. Some of the participants in this group (NCS3, NCS5, and NCS6) who could not complete the task in the restricted time confessed that they forgot how to write an academic essay properly though they accepted that they were effectively taught this skill in the previous year. Only NCS1 could be considered as more successful than her peers in her group as she said she was frequently revising what they had covered about academic writing in their prep year by practicing her writing from time to time. When it comes to the AWCS group who took the course, they claimed that they found the writing assignment slightly difficult because of time limitation and lack of certain vocabulary. It was found in their papers that they made mistakes that did not prevent the reader from the comprehension of what they had written in contrast to the ones written by the participants in the other group who made some parts of the writings totally incomprehensible for the reader because of the lack of grammar and accurate vocabulary use. However, it was obvious that both groups had the mistakes in terms of “word choices” in common.

Discussion

It can be understood from the study that the participants acquired their academic writing skills from the year that they spent in their prep school where they took intensive English lessons before they started to take their departmental courses. They all mentioned their content with the academic writing course in prep school, the focus of which was on academic writing and grammar because this kind of training facilitated their understanding of the content of the courses that they took. However, the participants stated that the curriculum did not pay great attention to academic speaking in which they thought they had some deficiencies. What is more, the students complained that the language education that they got did not provide them with certain terminology that they needed in their departments because of the student profiles who were from different departments but given the language education within one class. This shows the importance of ESP lessons (English for a specific purpose) and Tomak and Ataş (2019) emphasize the importance of an ESP writing course by designing a curriculum for the pre-intermediate engineering students who stated the need for it. What is more, the importance of word choice and the integration of technical words into the essays of the students was shown in the study conducted by Coxhead (2012) with 14 English as additional language students studying at a New Zealand university.

It is significant for the students who are taking English-medium instruction (EMI) in their faculties to have academic writing skills because they will need it both in their academic and professional lives (Nation, 2009; Weigle, 2007). However, the students who are in EMI programs but do not take "Academic Writing" course in their departments find it difficult to write academic papers that they need to submit as either as a term paper or final project. Osmond (2016) confirms that "writing effective, high-quality assignments should be difficult... studying at a university gives you the perfect opportunity to develop it" (p.1). Thus, students need to improve the skills that they acquired from the prep school with this course which is highly necessary for these learners because the development of writing skill requires practice (Ur, 1996). Thus, the ones who get this "Academic Writing" course feel more confident to write their term papers in English for the other courses that they take in their faculties. The importance of practice can also be seen in the situation of the participant coded as NCS1 who did not take the course but did not have any difficulty in writing academic papers because she regularly revised what they did in the prep school from time to time with her self-study but the others who did not practice the skills that they had gained in the previous year found it hard to write academically. Therefore, the more practice students do, the more flawless their writings will be (McGarthey et.al, 2004; Mcglynn & Kelly, 2019). With more practice their familiarity with the type they write will also increase as another study conducted by Altınmakas and Bayyurt (2019) in Turkish context confirms the importance of students' perceptions about academic writing and disciplinary-specific text genres in terms of their success in their EMI departments.

Though the "Academic Writing" course was designed to improve the writing skills of the learners, the participants stated that it improved their "vocabulary" and "grammar" knowledge as well as it can be seen on Table 6. What is more, studies carried on the improvement of academic writing show the significance of both grammar and vocabulary knowledge to prepare an academic prose (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Hinkel, 2012; Hinkel, 2013). Therefore, this improvement reflected on the essays written by the participants who submitted them to the researcher who was to check them for the evaluation of the performance of the participants because the ones who got the course (AWCS group) had less grammar mistakes which did not prevent the readers from understanding the message while the ones who did not get the course (NCS group) made major grammar mistakes that inhibited the comprehension of the readers. This can be seen on Table 8 which showed the mistakes made on the essay assignments of the participants. Omar (2019) focuses on the importance of grammar knowledge as for the success in academic writing skills of the learners.

Another point that is worth mentioning for this study is that learners who are good at academic writing (AWCS group) have some difficulty in content formation whereas the poor writers make major mistakes in terms of grammar and vocabulary. This reminds us Table 1 which shows the factors affecting writing (Cumming, 2001). Therefore, it can be concluded that learners who got the course were mostly process-focused as they did their best to create an appropriate content in their writings while the learners who did not the "Academic Writing" course were text-focused as they had major problems with their grammar and lexicon. Therefore, Ramadhanti et al. (2019) claim that the deficiencies of the students' writings in content development derive from their weakness of metacognition; therefore, students must be trained on the arrangement of words, concepts and terminology so that they will have less difficulty in content formation and finding the appropriate words for their academic papers.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from this study that it is necessary to offer "Academic Writing" course for the freshman of the departments providing English-medium instruction (EMI) because this course improves the other skills, especially grammar and vocabulary knowledge of the learners who are able to make use of them in the other courses that they take, apart from academic writing.

It was seen that learners benefitted from this course a lot with respect to the term papers and projects which they were to submit for the other courses that they took in their departments. What is more, the deficiencies of the students who were not offered to this course were detected in the papers that they were assigned to write and submit to the instructor. These learners who did not get the course added they had some

difficulties in academic writing, which they were taught in their prep year and which was to be improved with such a course at the first year of their studies in their undergraduate degree.

To be brief, this study confirms the efficiency and the benefits of the “Academic Writing” course for the freshman enrolled in English-medium instruction departments even though this course was offered online for these university students.

Limitations of The Study

This study was conducted with 11 participants, 5 of whom were offered “Academic Writing course while the other 6 participants did not take the course at the time of the study. All of the participants took part in the study with their own will and the researcher could not reach many others because of the pandemic which affected the lives of people including the university students as well. Therefore, the number of participants could have been more than 11 but these were the only people who wanted to contribute to the study. What is more, all the participants from the AWCS group were from the same department which was “Psychology” in the Faculty of Arts and Science. However, they were the only ones who wanted to participate in this study. Other students in other departments were not willing to take part. Thus, there was not a variety in terms of the departments of the participants in AWCS group just like the other group (NCS) in which there were students from a wide range of departments getting English-medium instruction.

Another limitation was that the participant students were made to write only one essay for the researcher to evaluate. However, it is known that it takes time to develop the writing skill (Graham, 2019) so it would be so much better if the participant students more than one essay so that the researcher could better evaluate their progress but due to the time limitations, this was not possible. What is more, the participant students were not willing to write more than one essay for this research as they knew they would not be evaluated officially with their paper so they thought they were wasting their time.

Last but not least, the papers of the participant students were evaluated only by the researcher himself because of the confidentiality issues. Nonetheless, it would be better if the papers were evaluated by two or three instructors apart from the researcher himself. However, as this study was carried out during the pandemic, it was not possible for the researcher to make such a request from another instructor who might be dealing with some other issues during those hard times.

Declarations

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Ethics: The data for this study were collected with the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Institution of Education Sciences in Marmara University. As for the details of the approval, Ethics Committee’s decision was given on 5th April 2021 and Ethics Committee approval issue number was 3-43.

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