



Teaching English as a Second Language
Quarterly (TESLQ)

(Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills)

40(4), Fall 2021, pp. 1-33

DOI: 10.22099/JTLS.2021.40619.2998

Online ISSN: 2717-1604

Print ISSN: 2008-8191

Research Paper

Academic Writing Courses in Applied Linguistics Master's Programs Through Student-instructor Lenses: Avenues for Improvement

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Abstract

The importance of incorporating graduate students' needs into academic writing courses has established a good reputation in EAP/ESP research. In addition, writing and publishing research articles (RA) is a universally established benchmark for students' academic flourish. The present study examines the status quo of academic writing courses in graduate programs to determine the extent academic writing needs of Applied Linguistics students, mainly RA writing needs, are addressed and practiced in the course. Drawing insights from the literature on academic writing, we developed two similar interview protocols for graduate students and course instructors to capture these key stakeholders' retrospective views on the course. We found that the course mainly focuses on proposal/thesis writing, not regarded as a critical need based on students' perspectives. Moreover, both students and instructors echoed the importance of RA writing as a significant area to be covered while emphasizing the need to integrate RA genre literacy into classroom practices. In this paper, we call for the reconsideration of students' primary needs in designing and running graduate writing programs and suggest that RA writing with a

Received: 07/06/2021

Accepted: 19/07/2021

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genre-based orientation become an instrumental component of academic writing courses in English as an Additional Language context (EAL).

Keywords: Academic Writing, Genre Literacy, Needs, Perspectives, Research Article, Status Quo

The concept of academic writing is not as straightforward as it seems, particularly at graduate levels. To alleviate student writers' issues in developing academic texts, there have been several attempts to modify the ways academic writing is conceptualized, instructed, and practiced. In this respect, a significant movement involves the Academic Literacy Approach (ALA), which emerged in the 1990s as a reaction against the inadequacy of academic writing instruction in UK universities (Wingate, 2012). ALA advocates focus on the notion that graduate students' writing concerns must be recognized and dealt with employing the essential disciplinary-specific pedagogical practices (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Goodfellow, 2005). In other words, in graduate programs, students' systematic socialization to disciplinary practices should be done mainly by recognizing writers' voices in terms of their academic writing needs (Bazerman, 2005; Cortes, 2019). There have been a good number of studies highlighting the significance of students' perceptions and needs in terms of academic writing practices (Abdulwahed Ahmed Ismail, 2011; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008). In this vein, researchers have almost related the inefficiency of academic writing programs at university levels to the lack of adequate attention to students' needs. Similar to ALA, Hyland (2013) put forward the notion of situated and dialogic academic writing and believed that students' awareness of disciplinary conventions and genre-based features could be of great help in turning writing

into a social practice (Lillis & Scott, 2007), which can therefore lead to more proportionate academic writing courses to student needs.

One important dimension of academic writing practice tends to be the development and publication of scholarly research articles (RA) (Lim & Luo, 2020). Scholars have acknowledged RA writing as a determining factor for academic knowledge promotion (Hyland, 2005). Graduate students face numerous challenges in their attempts to craft academic texts, which importantly holds true in the sphere of scholarly RA writing (Flowerdew, 2019; Flowerdew & Wang, 2016; Huang, 2010; Salager-Meyer, 2008). For example, graduate students pass through RA writing and publication odysseys to fulfill academic requisites, including course projects and graduation (Alinasab, Gholami, & Mohammadnia, 2021). The superiority of the English language for international publication has intensified academic writers' concerns in non-Anglophone countries where they need to fulfill academic obligations and align with the English-medium writing and publication world (Giraldo, 2019; Mur Duenas, 2012). To lighten students' concerns, previous scholars introduced a genre-based aspect to RA writing. Linking academic writing to genre-focused aspects is a well-established story in the literature. This research line has intensively focused on genre definitions and frameworks and provided insightful implications on the urgent need for *genre pedagogy* for academic writers (Phuong Dzung, 2008; Swales, 1990, 2004). Genre-based pedagogies intensely concentrate on the discursal and rhetorical features of RAs and clearly and explicitly present them to students, particularly those at graduate levels (Cheng, 2011; Swales, 1990, 2004).

Students' Perceptions: An Essential Dimension of Academic Writing Programs

Recently, there has been growing attention to student attitudes in academic writing research. A good number of scholars have concluded that incorporating students' perceptions and background knowledge into academic writing courses can serve as a crucial factor and resource in the effectiveness of the programs (Bazerman, 2005; Lea, 2004; Morton, Storch, & Thompson, 2015).

The notion of students' understanding of academic writing practices aligns with the tenets of ALA that emerged in 1990s in the UK. ALA foregrounds the roles of student writers' perceptions and concerns in developing and implementing academic writing courses and views the writing activity within particular contexts, in this case, academic disciplines. The fundamental principles of ALA can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Writing should be considered a practice rather than a skill (Lillis, 2001; Wingate, 2012).
- 2) Participants' perceptions on writing practice is of mounting importance in text interpretation and production (Morton et al., 2015)
- 3) Students should be induced to involve in academic communities and be aware of their needs and concerns (Goodfellow, 2005).
- 4) Student writers need to critique their writing practices (Bazerman, 2005).

In EAP/ESP tradition, there has been a substantial body of studies exploring students' perspectives on their academic writing experiences. A line of research, for example, characterized the challenges postgraduate students encounter in developing academic texts (Casanave, 2002; Prior, 1998; Tardy, 2006). In this realm, one particularly important study was undertaken by

Morton et al. (2015), who noticed significant manifoldness in multilingual students' viewpoints on the nature and meaning of academic writing in their first year of study. Despite the mounting focus of prior literature on students' general viewpoints in terms of their academic writing trajectories (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Morton et al., 2015), there is limited evidence on their perceptions concerning the instructional practices they are offered in academic writing classes, particularly in master's programs. Moreover, previous research lacks support on graduate students' attitudes toward specific academic writing practices such as RA writing and publishing, which is a key requirement for students' graduation and future academic and career prospects. Besides, it is still unclear whether this issue is adequately addressed in graduate writing courses as the best platforms to ease students' academic writing concerns, and, in this vein, there is no systematic study delving into the writing needs of graduate students and their views.

Alongside student attitudes, instructors' perspectives have been another research dimension in the literature, which has mainly explored instructor views on students' particular writing behaviors such as academic writing reluctance and problems in writing theses/dissertations (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006). This research line shows that students' academic writing practices are closely intertwined with instructors and their decisions and perspectives. Thus, academic writing instructors are key stakeholders whose beliefs and practices determine students' academic success, notably their scholarly writing competence and even publications. However, instructors' views in terms of students' academic writing needs and the requirements of writing classes are almost overlooked.

In accordance with the global concept of 'publish and flourish' (Gray, Madson, & Jackson, 2018), published papers act as springboards for initiation

into Ph.D. studies in Applied Linguistics, graduation, and employment prospects, especially for academic vacancies in the tertiary education system in Iran. Given this and paucity of the evidence on reporting the perceptions of students and instructors, we became interested in investigating the status quo of academic writing courses to explore the instructional priorities and probe into the extent students' academic writing needs and requirements are addressed. Moreover, this study aimed to determine how much RA writing is covered in academic writing courses in Iran. The following research questions guided the present study:

1. What are the perceptions of graduate students and course instructors on academic writing courses in the master's programs in applied linguistics?
2. To what extent is RA writing incorporated into the courses?

Method

Context of Study

The present paper aims to report on the status quo of the academic writing courses in Applied Linguistics MA programs of Iranian universities. The courses are mainly designed in coursework plus thesis format in these programs to improve students' professional development in their teaching career and academic writing abilities. In terms of coursework, two forms of EAP classes are offered. The first involves participants in the specific areas related to professional teaching and includes *Teaching Methodology*, *Methods of Teaching Language Skills*, and *Practicum course*. In the second strand of coursework, students are required to conduct and craft a research report in courses such as *Writing Academic Texts*, *Research Methodology*, *Seminar in Language Teaching Issues*, and *Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods* in English language teaching. Some courses lie between the two

zones of coursework and include *English for Specific Purposes*, *Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, and *Language Testing and Assessment* (National Syllabus for Applied Linguistics, 2016). In most of these courses, students are assigned to undertake mini-research projects and prepare RA-formatted reports. Additionally, they are encouraged to craft publishable RAs out of their theses with the help of their supervisors, and the RAs are scored separately in viva sessions.

We should note that the *Writing Academic Texts* course was previously named as *Advanced Writing* course. We conducted a document analysis of syllabi related to the old and modified writing courses and noticed that both had a similar set of objectives and themes with minor differences in the suggested resources. Developing the skills to write academic texts, particularly proposals/theses, were the main objective listed in both syllabi. Besides, both courses put a secondary focus on students' familiarity with academic papers without introducing relevant resources. The renewed syllabus had itemized several textbooks, mainly centering on paragraph development, how to become an academic writer, and practical writing (National Syllabus for Applied Linguistics, 1986, 2016). Totally, we did not notice any important differences between the two syllabi in terms of focus and objectives. In this paper, we consider the recent syllabus, namely *Writing Academic Texts*, as our analysis base to systematically explore the pedagogical features of the course and find out whether the instructional practices align with master's students' needs, particularly in terms of the universally burgeoning domain of RA crafting and publication.

Participants

The present research recruited two groups of participants consisting of master's students and academic writing instructors (students N=15; instructors N=4) to examine the status quo of academic writing courses, namely the *Writing Academic Texts* course, in Iranian universities. As regards the first group, we targeted former and current MA students majoring in Applied Linguistics in Iranian universities. The former MA students (N=5) included two Ph.D. students at the time of the study and three MA graduates working as professional teachers in private language schools or preparing for the national Ph.D. qualifying exam. It should be noted that each of the two Ph.D. students has authored one research paper in their areas of interest. However, regarding the current MA students (N=10), merely those who had completed the *Writing Academic Texts* course were considered in this study and were in the middle or last years of their graduate studies. Both former and current MA students were at an advanced English language proficiency level and had good disciplinary knowledge in Applied Linguistics as they met both criteria in the nationwide MA entrance exam. The students were selected based on convenience sampling and gave their informed participation consent.

We targeted academic writing instructors in TEFL as the second group of participants in this study. We believe that instructors' prolonged involvement in the writing practices of graduate students and adequate familiarity with their primary concerns can act as powerful and reliable resources to discern the status quo of the academic writing course. The instructors were all experienced teachers in the domain of EAP in general and academic writing in particular at the graduate and postgraduate levels. Furthermore, they were serving as active theses/dissertation supervisors in the applied linguistics departments of universities and had (co)authored more than ten RAs in

different areas. We invited ten academic writing instructors to participate in the study, and due to heavy teaching and research schedules, only four instructors granted their consent to participate in our study.

Semi-structured Interviews

In this study, we used semi-structured interviews to provide a holistic and inclusive image of needs and concerns in academic writing classes of Iranian masters' programs according to the attitudes of students and instructors. In preparing the interview protocols, we had two main orientations in mind. First, the main pedagogical features of the *Writing Academic Texts* course in our context were unknown and previously untouched. Second, based on the literature, we came to the conclusion that RA writing is a key requirement for professional development and academic flourish in most universities. Based on these two criteria, we designed two interview guides, separately for students and course instructors, zooming in the writing course components and students' RA writing literacy and needs.

Drawing insights from the literature on academic and RA writing research as well as our experience as former MA students and current academic writing instructors, we extracted several categories as the prompts for interview questions. In addition, consultative meetings were held among the researchers and two other academic writing instructors to obtain further ideas on the identified categories and settle the final round of questions. Totally, five main categories were included the questions exploring *course coverage*, *(dis)satisfaction*, *challenges and suggestions*, *RA literacy*, and *RA writing instruction*. The categories were similar for students and instructors, with differences merely lying in the wording and style of the questions. To ensure the content suitability of the two protocols, we further checked them

with two experienced and prolific academic writing instructors through online skype sessions. Except for several wording and language issues, all the categories and questions were agreed upon in terms of content validity (see Appendix for the protocols).

Data Coding and Procedures

This study adopted a qualitative design in terms of data collection, coding, and analysis. After giving their informed consent, the participants were interviewed using the interview protocols as retrospective think-aloud instruments. The interviews were held through skype meetings for non-local participants and face-to-face sessions in the case of local students and instructors. Each interview session lasted about 30 and 40 minutes for instructors and students, respectively. For the ease of the discussion and the reliability of the responses, the participants made the decision on the medium of the interviews, and the sessions were held either in English or Farsi. We recorded the interviews and then transcribed and translated (in the case of Farsi) the participants' responses. For verification purposes, the transcriptions and translations were emailed to the participants, and they were allowed to make modifications if deemed necessary. Additionally, the participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential.

We first conducted a pre-coding of the interview extracts for data analysis to get a general impression of the participants' retrospective thoughts (Dornyei, 2007). Then, the transcriptions were content-analyzed to extract the themes emerging for each category in the interview protocols. We conducted a cyclical content analysis of the data, and the main themes emerged in the final round of analysis and were given inclusive and informative labels. To ensure inter-coder reliability, we asked another rater (an experienced

instructor and supervisor in Applied Linguistics) to recode the data, and the Kappa Coefficient was found to be .76, which shows a moderate agreement in the coding.

Results

In this paper, we report on the status quo of the *Writing Academic Texts* course in graduate programs of Iranian universities, ultimately bearing in mind the need for RA literacy suggested by previous research. Below, we present the emerged themes for each category of the interview protocol together with a select number of interview extracts in each area.

Category 1: Course coverage

This type of background is related to the previous within-class academic writing practices of participants either as an instructor or a student. We intend to map the main features of the *Writing Academic Texts* course in terms of typical activities and tasks practiced in that course. As a result of the interview analysis, two themes emerged out of the responses of both instructors and students. There was only one theme that was specific to instructors.

1a. Proposal/thesis Writing as the Primary Goal

A notable theme of category 1 concerned the classroom activities dominantly centering on proposal/thesis writing in the academic writing course. Both instructors and students confirmed the theme as the primary focus of the classes. On the one hand, instructors believed that it was necessary to prioritize proposal and thesis writing in academic writing courses due to seemingly convincing reasons. One of the instructors noted:

1)...well, students should first to know how to write their proposals or theses, as their first and most important requirement. In this course, we primarily

work on this area of academic writing. Most activities in this respect are well-established and accessible. I think the ability to write a good thesis or proposal can pave the way for students' further academic needs which are more challenging and time-consuming.

It may well be the case that due to the prolonged history of proposal/thesis writing tasks and materials and their accessibility, instructors choose to focus on this firmly established area in academic writing. However, not all instructors are concerned about the materials and offer other reasons for their heavy focus on proposal/thesis writing practices. For example, an instructor noted students' need to activate their knowledge of writing basics through goal-oriented tasks on proposal/thesis writing.

On the other hand, students did not think of proposal/thesis writing as their primary need in academic settings despite the focus of the *Writing Academic Texts* course on this domain. Instead, students attach importance to other academic needs and believe that too much attention to proposal/thesis writing does not seem to be helpful. Extracts 2 shows a former MA student' reports on the main focus of the *Writing Academic Texts* course in graduate programs:

2) *...In the advanced writing course, I learned to write my proposal and thesis. The coursebook was related to thesis writing (write a thesis), and activities focused on different parts of theses and proposals. The course was almost theoretical like other classes, and there was no practical involvement of the students in some kind of writing activity. No attention to academic paper writing was surprising to me...*

1b. Heavy load of home-based assignments

Another theme of category 1 was found to be the heavy load of assignments to be done at home. Most instructors believed that numerous assignments would enhance their students' academic writing potentials and prepare them for future writing tasks.

3)...*I assign several tasks at the end of each session. I think this helps students keep practicing outside the class and discover the true nature of academic writing. These short-term assignments can prepare them for more advanced writing practices such as research paper writing.*

Students also reported on the massive load of assignments, still thesis-based, in academic writing courses and their other classes. Unlike instructors, students find little relevance of assignments to their real needs and consider them to be unhelpful. Extract 4 is a good indication of this point:

4)...*during the course, we were assigned with numerous tasks to do at home. It was very confusing that why we should do those tedious assignments without any clear purpose. For instance, finding and reading others' proposals and these cannot be helpful unless there is follow-up writing practice on our own. I know the course was supposed to help us improve our academic writing, but the assignments were not practical. We had such written assignments in other courses. For example, most teachers asked us to write research papers without any prior practice.*

1c. RA Writing for Self-study (Instructors)

Interestingly, the instructors noted that they encourage students to develop their academic paper writing capabilities on their own and outside the classroom environment. Extract 5 clearly presents this point:

5)...*I do not have enough time to focus on paper writing. I am well aware of my students' urgent need to write papers besides their theses for different*

purposes. Usually, I try to introduce some good journals and send them papers to review and write their own texts. Moreover, in the course syllabus, I list several paper writing manuals as additional resources for students to fulfil their needs and requirements outside this class.

Category 2: (Dis)satisfaction

Our second category in the interview protocol was satisfaction. We define satisfaction as the enjoyment element in the academic writing course of MA programs and the extent to which the courses are in line with students' expectations and needs. The content analysis of the interview responses has resulted in the following two themes. We should note that the results were in sharp contrast in the case of students and instructors.

2a. Course Deficiency/unaddressed Needs (Students)

Both former and current MA students did not appear to be satisfied with the *Writing Academic Texts* course they have attended or were attending. Nearly all of the students confirmed the inadequacy of the course in terms of addressing their needs. A former MA student commented:

6)...*the course was not satisfying. The tasks were not motivating since they only focused on irrelevant content to my needs. I expected something more useful, for example some practical assignments on paper writing. Paper writing was and is still a basic need of me, and I like to be practically involved...*

The same type of dissatisfaction was evident in current MA students' responses. Most MA students reported the lack of enjoyment and relevance as the main reasons for their dissatisfaction of the course.

2b. Courses Efficiency (Instructors)

Unlike students, instructors were stratified with their classes. For example, one of the experienced academic writing instructors said:

7)...*I have been teaching academic writing for many years. I think it is enjoyable and useful to help my students narrow down their thesis topics and decide on the design of their studies in this course. Besides, they have the opportunity to share their thoughts with classmates. This is actually what they need though they may not be aware of it...*

Category 3: Challenges and Suggestions

In this study, the third category of the interview protocol involves the most demanding elements in the *Writing Academic Texts* course for both instructors and students. Besides, this category further deals with their recommendations and thoughts on possible modifications and improvements in the target course to make it more constructive and useful in terms of addressing MA students' needs and requirements. Below, we first present the challenges reported by the participants and then map their suggestions for improvement purposes.

3a. Poor Basic Writing Literacy (Instructors)

Three of the participating instructors in this study have referred to the low writing proficiency of MA students as an important hindering factor in making academic writing courses more helpful and interesting. They believed that students' lack of knowledge about the basics of writing double worsens the situation:

8) ...*in most advanced writing courses, a majority of MA students lack the knowledge of writing basics such as paragraph development, coherence, cohesion, punctuation, and even grammar. In this course, I had to first go through those basics in order to well prepare my students to start writing their thesis or proposals...*

3b. Less Practicality (Students)

Somewhat related to the challenge reported by the instructors, the students, though implicitly, confirmed their lack of adequate proficiency in writing skill. In fact, most of them noted the impracticality element in academic writing classes as the main challenge they encountered. For example, one of the current MA students admitted his limited knowledge about writing and noted:

9)...*Honestly, I have a phobia of writing. In our academic writing course, I expect to control this fear, but I cannot. There is not enough practice on academic writing, and this terribly intensifies my fears of writing. There should be activities that step by step show us the way, but we just read some samples and listen to teachers' explanations...*

After examining the participants' key challenges in academic writing classes, we asked for their suggestions for possible improvements to the courses.

3c. Materials on RA Writing (Instructors)

The instructors believed that there should be well-established materials and tasks on RA writing in addition to the activities regarding thesis/proposal writing:

10)...*I have been using the same materials to practice thesis writing. However, I think our students also need to be exposed to the essentials of academic writing papers. Because of time and career restrictions, it is rather difficult for us to prepare suitable materials, which requires study and support...*

In the above extract, the instructor notes the necessity of support and systematic studies to develop and use appropriate materials and activities on RA crafting in academic writing courses. This requires a robust connection

among instructors, researchers, and material/program developers. Thus, he goes on to say:

11)...*therefore, there should be a logical responsibility distribution among instructors, researchers, and programmers. For example, researchers can identify students' needs in terms of paper writing, and then programmers and instructors should collaborate to use research results to develop the right materials for advanced writing courses.*

3.3.4 3d. Focus on RA writing (students)

Most of the students echoed their urgent need to obtain information about formatting a well-organized RA and the proper language to craft it. Extract 12 illustrates the perception of a former MA student:

12)... *The course should also deal with writing academic papers. For example, they can start with showing sample of papers to students and then ask them to gradually write different paper sections. Practices on the type of phrases and language items used in writing paper sections can be very helpful...*

Category 4: RA Literacy

The fourth category specifically deals with RA writing and its related background. We asked the participants about students' knowledge of RA crafting and the possible challenges they might have in this respect. The content analysis of the interview responses revealed the following themes.

4a. Poor Familiarity with RA Writing Essentials

There was a close agreement between the responses of instructors and students in terms of the knowledge of RA writing essentials held by students. The instructors believed that their students at the graduate level lacked the

required knowledge and awareness of RA organization and language. An instructor argued:

13)... *in general, MA students are not well aware of scholarly RA writing. If you ask about the organization of RAs in their fields, you would get inconclusive answers. Besides, they normally do not possess the language knowledge to write different sections of papers. A majority of MA students have very limited exposure to RA instruction and also how to publish a good paper...*

Similarly, students also reported on their knowledge gaps in terms of RA writing. A former MA student stated:

14)... *I was not familiar with the process of RA writing and publication. I had some written texts, but they were really messy. The language I used to was very poor and general. I think the way a paper is structured and styled can be the most important factor in its acceptability and possibly publication.*

4b. Discussion and Background Sections as the Most Challenging Parts

In terms of the challenges student writers encounter in RA writing, instructors and students held similar perceptions. A particular factor concerned students' difficulties in writing introduction and discussion sections for several reasons. One of the experienced instructors remarked:

15)... *students possess limited knowledge on RA writing in terms of organization and content. This issue is more shining when writing introduction and discussion parts. I believe that these sections require more sophisticated student awareness of the RA conventions in their own disciplines...*

In the same vein, students reported on their huge challenges in writing background and discussion of academic papers. A current MA student noted:

16)... *discussion and introduction are more demanding to write. We need more specific skills to write these parts and should know a lot about the content, format, language, etc. I also think that writing a good discussion or introduction can help us publish our papers...*

Category 5: RA Writing Instruction

The last category of our interview protocol specifically addresses RA writing instruction and what it could encompass. In this respect, we found three main themes.

5a. Genre-based RA Writing Instruction (Instructors)

According to the instructors' attitudes, RA writing instruction with a genre-based orientation can be an instrumental component in academic writing courses:

17)... *RA writing requires special attention. Honestly, our MA students are not proficient in this respect. For example, if you ask them what moves or steps to use in writing the discussion section, they would have little to say. Most students feel an urgent need to RA instruction. A main part of RA instruction could be on genre-based aspects such as move/step features suggested by well-known frameworks. I think this can alleviate numerous problems students face during their RA writing experiences...*

5b. Genre-based Course Materials on RA Writing (Instructors)

Another theme emerging out of instructors' responses concerned the need for reliable materials on genre features of RAs. They believed that lack of such materials restricts their adequate focus on RA writing in classes:

18)...*I do believe that genre-based instruction can be really helpful in addressing student needs. However, it is not easy to run such a course for us due to the lack of well-established materials. Because of time restrictions, we*

cannot do review studies and then pilot and design materials, including tasks. I think researchers and programmers should collaborate in reviewing the research on genre analysis and preparing proper course materials...

5c. Genre-based Explicit Instruction of Writing RA Sections and their Rhetorical Organization (Students)

Graduate students also called for incorporating RA writing into academic writing courses, particularly with a genre orientation. In the case of former MA students, this issue was more prominent:

19) *...this is a must. We need RA writing practices, even in PhD courses. We should be familiar with different parts of an academic paper to feel confident to write one. I think moves and steps are in fact exactly what we need. We also need to know the language items to write different parts...*

Current MA students did not exactly know the meaning genre, but they showed interest in obtaining information on the macro structures of RA sections and the required language to write them. A current MA student noted: 20)... *Well, I think it can be very helpful, especially for writing introduction and discussion, to get knowledge of structures beyond just vocabulary and paragraph writing. Other parts are rather easy to write with regard to organization and language, but these two parts need more elaboration...*

In addition to qualitative analysis, we conducted a frequency analysis of the data. Table 1 enumerates a general image of the emerged themes together with their frequency in the responses.

Table 1.

Themes for the Interview Categories and their Frequency

Interview Categories	Themes	Frequency of instances
1. Course Coverage	1a. Proposal/thesis writing as the primary practice	15 (8 S; 7 I)
	1b. Heavy load of home-based assignments	10 (7 S; 3 I)
	1c. RA writing for self-study (I)*	4
	2a. Course deficiency/unaddressed needs (S)	13
2. (Dis)satisfaction	2b. Course efficiency (I)	4
	3a. Poor basic writing literacy (I)	3
3. Challenges & suggestions	3b. Less practicality (S)	12
	3c. Materials on RA writing (I)	4
	3d. Focus on RA writing (S)	14
	4a. Poor familiarity with RA writing essentials	17 (13 S; 4 I)
4. RA literacy	4b. Discussion and background sections as the most challenging parts	19 (15 S; 4 I)
	5a. Genre-based RA writing instruction (I)	4
5. RA writing instruction	5b. Genre-based course materials on RA writing (I)	3
	5c. Genre-based explicit instruction of writing RA sections and their rhetorical organizations (S)	14

**Particular groups of participants are clarified in parentheses in the case of the themes exclusively belonging to that group; Instructors (I), Students (S)*

Discussion

This study examined two key issues in the *Writing Academic Texts* course in the Applied Linguistics master's program to assess its alignment with students' main academic writing needs and expectations. The first involved the major characteristics, and the second targeted the extent of RA writing practices in the course. Relying on the interview data gathered from master's

students and academic writing instructors, we identified several prevalent features in the course. Based on our content analysis, *proposal/thesis writing practices*, *Poor basic writing literacy*, *less focus on RA writing*, *less applicability of research findings for pedagogical purposes*, and *limited genre-based RA literacy and instruction* were found as the features characterizing the course. More importantly, student participants voiced their need for RA writing instruction, as their primary need, in the course, and instructors recommended developing suitable RA-based materials and activities by course designers through receiving support and guidance from research findings.

Generally, as our findings show, certain aspects of academic writing, such as proposal/thesis writing are optimally well-addressed in the *Writing Academic Texts* course, and there are abundant resources and course materials on these aspects. However, we found that more important aspects of academic writing, namely RA writing, have not been adequately addressed within the course and are mainly delegated to home-based assignments and self-study, and this lack partially contributed to students' dissatisfaction with the course. In this study, participant students explicitly raised this issue and called for the incorporation of RA writing in general and its genre-based features in particular in the academic writing course. This finding is partially congruent with Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008), who concluded that the little coverage of the students' real needs could be the main reason for the inadequacy of academic writing courses. In this paper, we take a similar position and link graduate students' dissatisfaction with the *Writing Academic Texts* course to the failure of instructors and course designers in addressing students' major needs, which, in our context, seem to be the need for explicit RA writing instruction and the incorporation of further hands-on practices.

This failure could be, in turn, attributed to the insufficient accommodation of students' perceptions of their academic writing practices in graduate programs, which is well echoed in the literature. For instance, a robust line of support is provided by the academic literacies approach that considers participants' perspectives as an inseparable element of academic writing (Hyland, 2013; Morton et al., 2015), and an effective writing program draws insights from student voices and encourages self-discovery writing practices (Bazerman, 2005). The point that matters here should be the applicability of students' perceptions on pedagogical grounds (Wingate, 2012), such as syllabus design in graduate programs in general and academic writing courses in particular. However, there is less integration of students' voices into academic writing pedagogy due to inadequate research results to programmers or instructors (Cortes, 2019; Lillis, 2003). Consequently, the outcome is ineffective academic writing courses that do not address students' advanced writing needs and may lead to their frustration, as we observed in the present study. Moreover, students' paramount need for RA writing instruction can be ascribed to their concerns about admission policies of universities and postgraduate programs in terms of RA writing and publication requirements (Li & Flowerdew, 2020). We think that graduate students are well aware of the rewards of the universally established *publish and flourish* tradition (Gray, Madson, & Jackson, 2018) and consequently prioritize their need to RA writing practices among other academic writing needs such as proposal/thesis writing.

On the other hand, our findings revealed that the instructors were less willing to integrate genre-based RA writing practices into their lesson plans and mostly preferred to assign them to students' self-study and participation in professional academic communities of practice. We ascribe this

discrepancy between instructors' way of teaching and students' dissatisfaction to the paucity of established source materials on RA genre literacy. There are a plethora of studies on genre-based RA writing aspects, including move/step features (Cheng, 2006; Lim, 2012; Tardy, 2006, 2009, 2016; Wang, 2017), lexical bundles and linguistic features (Cortes, 2013; Kanoksilapatham, 2015; Le & Harrington, 2015; Li, Franken, & Wu, 2020), and rhetorical organization (Lim, 2012; Sadeghi & Alinasab, 2020) of different RA sections. However, there have not been concerted efforts to translate this growing knowledge into hands-on pedagogical tasks and activities in the form of well-composed source materials and commercial books that instructors could readily adopt/adapt in their classes (Dong & Lu, 2020; Charles, 2007). In this study, course instructors found it too demanding to devise appropriate materials based on the latest research on RA genre literacy, perhaps due to their busy teaching schedules (Cortes, 2019). Indeed, when professional material writers do not embark on this issue, how one could expect instructors with many other teaching responsibilities to craft specialized materials for RA writing and its genre features.

Conclusion

In this paper, we heuristically identified and reported the dominant characteristics of the *Writing Academic Texts* course in graduate programs based on the perspectives of students and instructors. Our incentive was to delineate the real needs of graduate students in terms of their academic writing practices, which is a new step in our context. To the existing studies that highlighted the importance of considering student perceptions in academic writing courses (Bazerman, 2005; Morton et al., 2015), we add more accurate data on what those perceptions are in reality. Based on the findings, English

as an Additional Language (EAL) graduate students would appreciate RA writing instruction in academic writing classes, preferably one that adopts a genre-based approach. Our findings further suggested that academic writing courses scantily embody graduate students' needs and center rather exclusively on proposal/thesis writing practices. We also found slight systematic connections between research and pedagogy of academic writing, which leads to the lack of robust materials packages, particularly genre-based, in the realm of RA writing.

Our findings can provide insights for academic writing instructors and materials developers at graduate levels. Academic writing instructors could widen their understanding of students' advanced writing concerns and teach proportionately to their needs. By extension, it would be a good idea to incorporate RA writing practices into academic writing and English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) classes and equip graduate students, who are at the outset of scholarly writing, with RA genre literacy including moves/steps features, rhetorical organization, and linguistic realizations. Flowerdew and Wang (2016) noted that academic writing courses could be the best platforms to focus on the interplay of factors, including genre. This type of change in academic writing classes would require more cooperation between instructors and materials designers. The latter may devote extended time to go through the recent research on RA writing literacy and devise the materials that properly address students' needs. Having done this, materials designers could mediate the link between research and practice (Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2003) and contribute to needs-based academic writing instruction, more notably RA writing and possibly publication that is a universal notion in the academic and professional success of students.

We have two limitations to note in this study. First, our study was limited in terms of contextual scope as we interviewed students and instructors from a small number of universities. Thus, the identified features of academic writing classes and student needs may not be taken as the representative of all graduate programs and universities in Iran. Furthermore, we conducted this study in a non-Anglophone and EFL setting where the dominion of the English language over academic writing and publication may be a big concern for students, and this *linguistic injustice* (Clavero, 2010; Hyland, 2016) may have affected our findings in terms of students' phobic perspectives on academic writing practices, particularly RA writing. While broadening its context, future research could triangulate the data on graduate students' needs through intensive observations of academic writing classes and supervision sessions between students and supervisors at both graduate and postgraduate levels across universities. Moreover, further studies can give academic writing needs more global spirit by comparing them in the case of native and non-native graduate students in applied linguistics. We recommend future researchers extract a common core of native and non-native students' academic writing needs, more importantly, the need for RA genre literacy, to devise proper source materials for universal uses.

In conclusion, we think that our study offers a new perspective on academic writing that may serve as a springboard for launching more needs-based writing programs and workshops at the graduate and even postgraduate levels while prioritizing RA instruction through genre-focused lenses.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Appendix: Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol: MA/PhD students in Applied Linguistics

1. Course coverage

- How well has the Writing Academic Texts prepared you for academic writing in general and research article writing in particular?
- What are the most predominant features of the course? Could you elaborate on the content, activities, and assignments (even term projects) of those courses? Can RA writing be a part of those courses?
- Have different subsections of RA sections (e.g., introduction, discussion, conclusion, etc.) been covered? Could you elaborate on some of the activities and materials?

2. (Dis)satisfaction

- Did/Do you enjoy taking part in the Writing Academic Texts course? Were/Are you satisfied with the class?
- What elements in those courses are more interesting?
- What type of academic writing course would you prefer (in terms of content, focus, etc.)? What do you think a writing course should focus on?

3. Challenges and suggestions

- What are the lacks of the Writing Academic Texts course in your view?
- What suggestions can you offer to make the course more useful?

4. RA literacy

- What difficulties can you list for writing publishable research papers?
- Which sections of a research paper (introduction, discussion, conclusion, etc.) are more demanding to write? How do you deal with these problems?

5. RA Writing instruction

- Do you think that RA writing should be included in the course?
- What do you need to know about RA writing?
- If yes, which sections of a research article (title, abstract, introduction, review, method, results, discussion, and conclusion) should receive more attention during this course?

Interview protocol: Academic writing course instructors

1. Course coverage

- What are the most predominant features of writing academic texts (advanced writing) courses in your context? Could you elaborate on the content for this course?
- To what extent do you address the issue of writing research articles in your classes? If so, which sections of a research article receive more attention (title, abstract, discussion, etc.)? Could you name some of the classroom-based activities and assignments (in or outside class) you use in this respect?

2. (Dis)satisfaction

- How much do you think teaching Writing Academic Texts (advanced writing) courses is satisfying?
- What elements (tasks, activities, content, etc.) in those courses are satisfying?

3. Challenges and suggestions

- What are the major challenges you face in teaching Writing Academic Texts (advanced writing) courses?
- What are the lacks of the Writing Academic Texts (advanced writing) courses?

- What changes/modifications in terms of course materials and class tasks and assignments are needed to make these courses as constructive as possible?

4. RA Literacy

- How many years have you been involved in research paper writing and publishing them?
- What are the main difficulties in writing publishable research articles for graduate students? Which sections of a research paper (abstract, discussion, conclusion, etc.) are more demanding to write?

5. RA Writing instruction

- To what extent do you feel the need to develop and implement RA writing materials for graduate writing courses in applied linguistics? Do you think that RA should be a part of the syllabus for these courses?
- If yes, which sections of a research article (title, abstract, introduction, review, method, results, discussion, and conclusion) need more attention during this course?
- Are there any ready-made materials on genre-based research article writing available to you? If yes, do they include any tasks or activities related to research article writing or do you have to tailor them yourself?