The Students' Gap in Academic Writing and Its Implications in Attaining Quality Education: The Case of TEFL Students in Hawassa University

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Abstract: The main objective of the study was to investigate the students' gap in their academic writing and its implications in improving quality education. The research was designed in conformity with the principle of descriptive method. To this effect, the data were collected through document analysis, questionnaire and semi-structured interview. In like manner, the data from the document analysis revealed that 30 % of the academic papers selected for this study, did not give due attention to the relevance of subject matter while discussing ideas under various argumentative premises. In further investigation, it is possible to observe that 52.8% of the students did not provide personal reflections on the major arguments that they discussed in their papers. Moreover, 41.42% of the students committed inconsistency errors, 37.14% fused errors, and 34.28% fragmented sentence errors, 91.42% of them had problems in using correct tenses, 44.28% of them had pitfalls in selecting appropriate words that suit the context under discussion. According to the data from the questionnaire, 51.42% of the respondents confirmed that they gave less attention to the value of subject matter in their papers. Similarly, 51.42 % of the respondents did not reflect their personal views on their academic papers to make their arguments contextualized. Lastly, 30 (42.85%) of the respondents did not have a hobby of writing at their spare-time. As the results from the interview showed, firstly, majority of the students did not have clear idea about the attributes of an academic writing. Secondly, the same number of respondents confirmed that they did not evaluate the degree of relevance of the subject matter that they discussed in their academic papers. Thirdly, all of them rated their grammar skill as "good" except two respondents. Finally, as the result from the same tool showed, all of the respondents did not feel comfortable to peer edit each other's paper. In conclusion, due to the severe constraints in producing standard academic papers, the effort to improve the quality of education is being highly challenged.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Academic writing is a type of writing most frequently produced for scholars. It includes a variety of writing genres such as assignments, research reports, summaries, position papers, discussion papers, essays, book reviews and examination essays. It is a universal fact that every university student is expected to frequently produce the above writing genres when he/she takes different courses. Consequently, there is an equivocally accepted reality that when the students lack competence in producing adequate academic writing specifically at university level, their academic performance is potentially affected. Thus, developing this skill sufficiently and adequately is a must for every student in university.

To write full-fledged and high standard academic papers, it is mandatory to critically deliberate the materials that should be read, the extent to which sound arguments that involve high order thinking are presented , the manners in which ideas are coherently divided into different paragraphs, the standard and accuracy level of the language that suits the academic world, the appropriate use of diction and mechanics and personal views that the writer reflects for or against the major premises. When students think carefully on the above requirements, their ability in understanding and analyzing concepts, working through them, developing their own thoughts about the subject would enhance at an unprecedented rate as any academic written work is always prone to processing, synthesizing, interpreting and discussing different information with substantive evidences. In sum, to come up with a strong academic writing, which is principally impersonal by its very nature, understanding the expectations of the audience, the established conventions and the requirements listed above are of paramount significance.

The other worth mentioning point that should be taken into account is that any academic writing first and foremost needs sufficient time for planning. A good plan is a blue print which has power to determine the quality of an academic writing. To see the case with some details, when a student intends to write an academic paper, he/she must first design a clear road-map that shows the direction and progress of the work   not only to satisfy himself/herself but also to meet the expectation of the academic community to whom the paper targets at for there is a strong belief that academic writing must be more than personal response or narration.

The other important perquisite of an academic writing is researching. An academic writing needs strong, plausible and data-based argument which has capacity to answer those questions that are likely to be asked by the evaluator of the paper and alleviate his/her doubts and queries in the reading process. To achieve this, the academic writer must first try to sort out what he/she has known about the subject from what he/she thinks about. Once decision is made on the materials to be read, the researcher is then expected to critically read and make relevant notes. At this stage of the work, the other thing that researcher should give emphasis is to record all the sources of the reference that will later be used as in-text or out-text citations. The next stage is ordering ideas according to their degree of significance. Doing this helps the writer to determine the degree of relevance of ideas that need to appear in each paragraph. Moreover, when ideas are sequentially ordered in such a way, it will become easy for readers to understand the major ideas discussed in the paragraph.
Up on accomplishing all the above tasks, the next activities are drafting, editing, revising, reviewing and writing the final draft. Any type of writing is not the result of a single moment thinking. In most cases, it is essentially the nature of writing to pass through different stages as there are different essential things that would be done at each stage. When the writer passes through different processes, for example, he/she can have an opportunity to carefully and deeply evaluate the degree of adequateness of each activity performed at each stage so that it will become easy to check the overall quality of the academic paper. The other important point is that each stage of writing forces the writer to further explain the main point of each paragraph with a variety of credible supportive evidences, illustrations and concrete data.

1.2 Statement of the Problem
As subsequent research studies revealed, especially those students entering tertiary level of post-graduate programme, are more frequently engaged in wide, deep and abundant academic writing activities than undergraduate students because the   most frequently used method of teaching at this level is autonomous learning. Leki (2001) corroborates this opinion remarking: "In most foreign language teaching/learning contexts, secondary school students are hardly engaged in academic writing during their secondary school education." Hence, rich academic writing skill is responsible for the success of the students at postgraduate level. When the argument is seen with particular reference to foreign language students at postgraduate level, the necessity of academic writing skill increases more and more as they are would be English teachers who are going to teach different genres of writing in different educational institutes Kelley (2008). No matter how intelligent a student is, unless his/her academic writing skills are up to the required standard, meeting institutional literacy expectations will become under question mark.Hence, achieving a dependable academic writing skill is decisive for the overall academic   success to be envisaged.

It is undeniable fact that academic writing is the language of scholarship and demonstrates eligibility of higher education. Despite the fact that the quality of an individual's written work determines his/her scholarship and acceptance in academia, a large number of studies (Olivas and Li,2006; Horner & Min-Zhan, 1999; Rose, 1989) report that it is a multifaceted language skill which is both demanding and challenging to be achieved . First, Writing involves idea generation, drafting, editing, redrafting, analyzing, implying the ability to paraphrase information or transforming information into new texts as in argumentative writing (Myles, 2002).

The other constraint that makes academic writing challenging is that it is a skill that students often develop in formal instructional settings though their proficiency may be influenced by cognitive development, educational experiences and overall proficiency.Moreover, an academic writing has to do with psychology. Unlike speaking, writing is a solitary activity which is mostly carried out without immediate feedback from the audience. Hence, the writer is not confident about the acceptability of his/her writing until it reaches the audience and feedback is received. Developing academic writing skills, therefore, requires strong enthusiasm, patience and creative thinking.

The rationale for conducting this research is the researcher's exposure to teaching five different courses to TEFL students in Hawassa University since 2012. When he has been conducting these courses to these students, he made students produce different individual and group academic papers. When he evaluates the papers that the students produced in each year, he observes a variety of errors despite his constant support. If such errors increase in number from time to time especially at this level of learning, he has the anxiety that the English language proficiency of our students will alarmingly decline and our effort to improve the quality of education remain in its statuesque. Therefore, he has the belief that identifying the gap of the students on their

academic writing will help different stakeholders to think the remedial solutions recommended in this study and act accordingly.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Major Objective of the Study

The main objective of this research is to explore the gap of TEFL students in producing academic papers and point out its implications in attaining quality education

Specific Objectives

1. examine the frequency of sentence construction errors that were observed on the students' academic writing
2. check the frequency of surface feature errors that could affect intelligibility
3. evaluate the extent to which students are efficient in giving attention to subject matter relevance, idea organizations, evidence-based analysis and personal reflections in their academic papers

Significance of the Study

This study primarily serves instructors in TEFL programme, coordinators of the programme, the Department of English Language and Literature and students attending their education in this programme.

To begin with, those instructors in TEFL programme can go through the findings and attempt to support students using different strategies so as to alleviate the dominant errors occurred in the academic papers of the students. Secondly, the programme coordinators and Department heads may take the findings into consideration and facilitate situations in which new courses that enable students improve their academic writing skills are designed. Thirdly, TEFL students can get opportunity to be aware of the frequently committed errors and take remedial solutions that enable them to tackle the problem

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Description of the Study Area

Hawassa University or HU was established in the north east direction of the outskirt of Hawassa City in April 2000. It is located in the heart of the East African rift-valley. The university was established by merging three colleges in southern Ethiopia: Awassa College of Agriculture, Wondogenet College of Forestry and Dilla College of Teacher Education and Health Sciences. The university has been expanded by increasing its student in-take capacity and launching new colleges, institutes, departments, programs and research facilities.

2.2. Study Subjects

The major subjects of this study were academic writing papers collected from TEFL students and the students who attended their education in this programme from 2012__2018.

2.3. Study Design

2.3.1 study type

This research is designed in line with the principles of descriptive method that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. The major reason is that the study required data that lead to in-depth analysis.

2.3.2 sample size and sampling procedure

The study required 70 academic writing papers that were randomly selected from TEFL Students who attended their education within seven years at Hawassa University. In determining the size, the researcher has offered five different courses to 90 students from 2012__2018 academic years. Accordingly, he selected 10 papers randomly from each batch and reserved them for the purpose of this research. Then the gap of each student on his/her writing was evaluated by categorizing the committed errors as: errors of subject matter, errors in paragraphing , errors in paraphrasing, errors in reflection, errors in sentence construction ,errors in grammatical usage, errors in diction , errors in citation and errors in using mechanics.

One point that needs to be made clear here is that if the student committed several errors of the same type, only one error was taken as part of the data because the purpose of the study is to evaluate the type and frequency of errors at group level Giridiharan (2012:578). Furthermore, seventy of the students whose papers were selected for evaluation were made to fill in the questionnaires that were set earlier.

2.4. Study Methodology

The researcher answered the research questions by analyzing the data that he collected through document analysis, questionnaires and semi-structure interviews. To achieve this, the data from the documents were first transcribed on a blank sheet of paper. Then, each of the error was grouped into 8 major categories and two sub categories. Next, the error under each category was computed and converted into percentage. Finally, an account of explanation was given to clarify what each percentage was meant to. The data from the questionnaire had first been entered into SPSS software and then a descriptive statistical approach was used to interpret and discuss each implication in line with the particular research question that it profoundly targeted at

to answer. The data from the semi-structured interview, however, were analyzed through deep interpretations and explanations using thematic approach in line with the research question that each datum aimed at to answer. Regarding the procedures followed, every semester, before the researcher commences classes, he has been giving input to students on the basic requirements of an academic writing. After the papers were submitted to him on the deadline which had been fixed earlier, he evaluated the quality of each paper based on the criteria mentioned above. In evaluating the gaps of each student, the researcher   had opportunities for immersion, reflection and explication where new linkages to findings can be made during the evaluation of the students' academic papers. After the evaluation had been over, he used to select 10 papers randomly and reserved them separately so as to use them for this research. Having done this, he used to ask those students whose papers were selected (70 of them) to fill in the questionnaires. Finally, from each batch of students, 2, totally14 students, were selected for interview and short orientations were first given to the respondents about the way they respond to the items. Accordingly, the researcher carried on the interview by deriving a number of questions from the guide that he had set out earlier. The responses of each interviewee were video-tape-recorded to listen to the responses repetitively when necessary.

2.5. Data Management and Analysis
        In analyzing the data from the students' academic writing, the researcher first transcribed each error on a blank sheet of paper and then he grouped similar errors into one category. Next, he added up the errors in each category and converted them into percentages. Finally, he explained what each percentage purports based on the research questions stipulated in this study. With regard to the questionnaire items, the researcher looked into the results secured from the SPSS programme very carefully, interpreted and discussed on the basis of the research questions in this study. In discussing the semi-structured interview data, first the data were transcribed from the tape-recorder onto blank sheets of paper. Secondly, the transcribed data were coded to identify the emerging major and sub-themes. Finally, the implication of each theme was lucidly explained in conformity with the research question it could address.

IV. RESULT
        30 % of the academic papers selected for this study did not give due attention to the relevance of subject matter while discussing ideas under different argumentative premises. Their main focus was on idea organization and other surface-features of the language. In like manner, as the data from the questionnaire revealed, 41.41% of the respondents confirmed that they had limitation in discussing strong subject matter in their academic writing. This implied that the students in this programme need to be always oriented and supported how they explore sufficient items of information from different sources and screen them out according to their degree of significance.
        52.8% of the students did not provide personal reflections on the major arguments that they discussed in their paper. In the same way, the data from the questionnaire delineated that 51.42 % of the respondents did not reflect their personal views on their academic papers to make their arguments deeper and contextualized. The results from the interview and the questionnaire similarly corroborated the same scenario.
        In the academic papers evaluated, 41.42% of the papers consisted of inconsistency errors, 37.14% contained fused errors, and 34.28% carried fragmented sentences errors, 91.42% of them had wrong verb tense use. Misuse of prepositions, gerunds, infinitives and mechanics   was also found out far and wide in most papers.
        As analysis on the academic papers indicated, 44.28% of the students had pitfalls in selecting appropriate words that suit the context under discussion. By the same token, 41.44 % of the respondents to the questionnaire witnessed the same thing. Furthermore, 52. 85% of the students had problem in applying both in-text and out-text citations in their academic writings.
        Investigations from the data in the questionnaire showed that only 68.68% of the respondents had no clear awareness about the basic requirements of an academic writing.
        As the data in the questionnaire depicted, 53.72% of the students had negative attitude towards writing skill. If this is the reality, the pieces of writing that they produce will not satisfy their readers because there is a belief among scholars that attitude has a power to determine 80% of the quality of a person's writing.
        92.85% of the students carryout self editing to value the content of their academic written work. With regard to peer-editing, however, the same percentage of students confirmed that they did not have the habit of peer-editing on their academic writing. The data from the interview similarly confirmed the same reality.
        When the skill of the students in paraphrasing written texts was examined, 50% of the students did not have a good skill to paraphrase longer texts.
        59.85% of the students witnessed that they did not have a skill of critical reading. The implication is that if passive or cursory reading surpasses critical reading, the students are not able to look for answers to the questions why and how so that an academic writing hardly contributes its share to the scientific world.

Regarding their skill in controlling plagiarization through citation, 50% of the respondents responded that they had difficulties in citing the location of borrowed references appropriately.

Finally, according to the data from the questionnaire, 30 (42.85) of the respondents did not have a hobby of writing at their spare-time. Writing, especially in the context of foreign language,   is the result of relentless and meaningful practices. Thus, unless students give time for personal writing, it is unthinkable to achieve this skill and use it for academic purposes. To help writers, in this case, it is essential to set up a writing center at least in some selected universities.

V. DISCUSSION
4.1 Discussion of the results from the analysis of the Academic Papers
Table1: Errors Committed

No	Types of Errors Identified		No of Students Committed the Errors	%
1	subject matter (factual accuracy)		21	30
2	paragraphing		18	25.71
3	Inability to give personal reflection		37	52.85
4	Sentence construction			
	4.1	Sentence fragment errors	24	34.28
	4.2	Comma fault	12	17.14
	4.3	Fused sentences	26	37.14
	4.4	Dangled modifiers	14	20
	4.5	Inconsistencies	29	41.42
5		Grammar Errors		
	5.1	Tense	64	91.42
	5.2	Subject-verb agreement	56	80
	5.3	Voices	23	32.85
	5.4	Articles	15	21.42
	5.5	Prepositions	31	44.28
	5.6	Gerunds& Infinitives	26	37.14
	5.7	Conditional tenses	20	28.57
6		Dictions	31	44.28
7		Citation	37	52.85
8		Mechanical	28	40.00

A close investigation of the data in the above table shows that 30% of the students had difficulty in understanding and discussing the subject matter of their academic writing. The implication is that they did their academic papers without clearly designed plan that their argument was rumpus. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the effort that they exerted on their academic paper was not up to the required standard. We know that one of the most important requirements in academic writing is ability to understand main contents that need to be incorporated and discuss them with different supporting evidences and clear illustrations. If this component is ignored, the academic paper that the students produced will hardly have any contribution to the development of the discipline.

When the respondents' skill in reflecting personal views on their academic writing was examined, 52.8% of the academic papers witnessed that the students were not accustomed to giving personal reflections on the theories that they presented and discussed. This finding suggests that the students had serious difficulties in understanding the subject matter of their assignments and contextualizing facts with realities in their milieu. Learning becomes active and meaningful when the learner has ability to associate, compare, contrast and personalize the information that he/she presented and discussed in any academic paper.

As the data in the above table show, 41.42% the students committed inconsistency errors, 37.14% fused errors and 34.28% sentence fragmented errors. We know that lessons that help to correct such errors are given at first year level of university education in the common course titled ''Basic Writing Skills''. if students at this level have difficulty in writing sentences, by and large, free from such errors, who is going to teach the lesson, "**correct sentence construction ''**? Thus, the result gives us an alarm that the problems in the teaching/learning of English have reached a precarious stage.

When the students' English tense knowledge is examined, 91.42 % of the students had problem in using correct tenses in their sentences. Regarding subject-verb agreement, 80% of the students could not use sentences in which the subjects and the verbs are in correct agreement. The difficulties on prepositions, gerunds and infinitives were also not negligible. On the basis of the above data, we can suggest that the vast majority of

the students had severe constraints in using correct tenses and subjects that agree with verbs. As we know, the ultimate goal of fluency is to gradually achieve accuracy because fluency by itself is nothing unless it could help the enhancement of accuracy. Academic writing, as one of the genres, requires correct use of grammar. Most importantly postgraduate students, who are working to attain MA degree in TEFL, must strive to achieve accuracy. The wrong sentences we teach today will be our guarantee to have unique English tomorrow. Hereby, it seems important to be aware that the ultimate goal of communicative approach is to achieve accuracy through fluency.

The other worth mentioning point is that 44.28% of the students had pitfalls in selecting appropriate words that suit the academic convention. Academic writing experts advise that the diction for academic writing should be courteous, soft, and familiar and should avoid sesquipedals. In its nutshell, unless students are able to select the appropriate words that suit the particular writing assignment, the work loses it quality at large extent.

The other severe problem of the students in their academic writing was their skill in using both in-text and out-text citations. For example,, 52. 85% of the students could not acknowledge the authorities from whom they borrowed ideas. Academic conventions recommend that writers must properly cite the sources of information that they borrowed in explaining their argument. If they fail to do this, many of the laws in different countries consider them as acts of theft that lead to different types of penalty. Moreover, such actions breach the convention of the academic writing and devalue the reputation of the writer.

4.2 Discussion of the results from the analysis of the Questionnaire

Table 2: Capacity in Producing Well-developed Academic Written Work

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, SDA=Strongly Disagree, A=Agree, DA=Disagree, ND=Not decided

No	Statement	Responses									
		SA	%	A	%	SDA	%	DA	%	ND	%
1	I am well aware of the qualities of a well developed academic paper			29	41.42	25	35.71	11	15.71	5	7.14
2	I always feel comfortable when I begin to write an academic paper.	4	5.71	27	38.57	21	30	17	24.28	1	1.42
3	I always evaluate the content of my academic writing before I submit to my instructor.	3	4.28	31	44.28	26	37.14	7	10	3	4.28
4	I always evaluate the way I paragraphed Ideas in my academic writing.	5	7.14	34	48.57	12	17.14	19	27.14	0	0
5	I always argue for or against the premise of the original writer in my academic writing.			37	52.85	18	25.71	11	15.71	4	5.71
6	I always reflect my view on the academic writing that I have produced.			23	32.85	26	37.14	10	14.28	11	15.71
7	When the ideas that I take from other sources are long, I have the ability to paraphrase and synthesize it in my own English.	20	28.57	31	44.28	6	8.57	4	5.71	9	12.85
8	I have an adequate skill in summarizing any text that I want to incorporate into my academic writing.	13	18.57	22	31.42	31	44.28	4	5.71	0	0
9	I have the ability to critically read any reference for my academic writing	4	5.71	25	35.71	12	17.14	19	27.14	10	14.28

10	I am always aware of how to control plagiarization by applying the conventions	18	25.71	31	44.28	13	18.57	3	4.28	5	7.14
11	My grammar skills are up to the required standard to explain ideas in my academic writing.	10	14.28	21	30	32	45.71	7	10.00	0	0
12	I always use different strategies to improve my grammar skills.	13	18.57	36	51.42	4	5.71	7	10.00	0	0
13	I have good ability to use the appropriate diction into my academic writing.	8	11.42	33	47.14	21	30	3	4.28	5	7.14
14	I have an adequate skill in using different mechanics in my academic writing.	23	32.85	23	32.85	21	30	3	4.28	4	5.71
15	I have the habit of self-editing, revising and reviewing on my academic writing before I submit it to my instructor.	23	32.85	42	60	5	7.14	0	0	0	0
16	I have the habit of peer – feedback provision before I submit my academic writing to my instructor.	0	0	4	5.71	42	60	23	32.85	0	0
17	I practice free-writing during my spare time.	3	4.28	5	7.14	32	45.71	30	42.85	0	0

As we can observe from the above table, the first item asked the respondents whether they are well aware of or not the quality of well written academic paper. In their response, 29(41.42%)of them responded that they agreed and others disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement. This data suggest that majority of the students did not have sufficient idea about the basic requirements of an academic writing. Hence, the conclusion is that if students at this level had less awareness about the attributes of an academic writing, there is a missing link between what we teach in writing and research classes and the students' actual performances. Studies in this area show us that any student, who attends university education, must equip himself/herself first with the basic nature of academic writing. Especially, those students, who are being trained as professionals in English language are believed as main agents who should inculcate such lessons in the mind of their students adequately and extensively. However, when the students at postgraduate level confirm that they have due gap in this area, the degree of the problem is very annoying and frustrating.

When the responses in item number two are analyzed, we understand that 4(5.71%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 27(38.57%) agreed to the proposal. These data can tell us that more than half of the students had negative attitude towards writing skill. From this result, we can infer that the pieces of writing that they produce will not satisfy their readers because there is a belief among scholars that attitude has a power to determine 80% of the quality of a person's writing. Unless the person has positive attitude towards it, no matter how outstanding he/she is, the final product barely becomes successful.

As we can observe from the above data, 92.85 % of the students carried out self editing to value the degree of the subject matter of their academic written work. This is a very commendable trend. When we examine the themes of modern approaches to foreign language teaching, presenting strong subject matter both in written and spoken communications is achieving 40% of the goal in that particular activity.

When we examine the data under item number item 4, we observe that 5(7.14%) strongly agreed and 34(48.57%) agreed that they checked the way they paragraphed ideas in their academic writing. These data signify that the majority, though not vast, evaluated the way they divide ideas into different paragraphs. When this is properly done, ideas flow from one direction to other direction smoothly so that the readers can grasp the central ideas without paying too much cost.

Concerning their effort to reflect their own personal feeling on the major point that they argued, 23 (32.85%) agreed to the statement. The others disagreed or strongly disagreed. This finding delineates that the vast majority of the respondents did not give personal reflection on the ideas that they argued for against the premise. If this is the reality, as has been discussed in the document analysis part, the writers had deficiency in

associating what they found out in their current paper with the realities in their own context. Consequently, their paper is the result of thinking in vacuum.

In responding to the item that asked them whether they had dependable skill in paraphrasing and synthesizing ideas that were taken from different sources, 20(28.57%) strongly agreed and 31(44.28%) agreed to the proposal. From these data we can understand that the number of students who had capacity to paraphrase ideas in their own English and those who had not, were 50%----to—50%. These responses signal that the students had difficulty to read a text and understand the gist and express ideas in one's own idea. At this level of learning, especially in TEFL area, if such skills are very weak, the chance to succeed in the study and at the end of the day teaching English at any academic institution will suffer greatly with a variety of setbacks.

With regard to their ability in fighting plagiarization through genuine citation, 18 (25.71%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 31(44.28%) agreed that they cited the location of borrowed references appropriately. On the basis of these data, we can say that the vast majority (69.99%) of the students did not have difficulty to acknowledge the sources of references used in their academic writing.

When the respondents were asked to respond to the level of their present grammar skill, 32(45.71%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and 7 (10%) disagreed that their grammar skill was not up to the required standard to express their ideas. This result has close similarity with the result obtained from the document analysis.

Regarding their skills in using appropriate diction in their academic papers, 8(11.42%) strongly agreed and 33(47.14%) agreed that they had the skill of using appropriate diction for appropriate situations. The rest 41%, however, witnessed that they had shortcomings in using the right word for the right purpose. Vocabulary knowledge by itself is not enough; students especially who are doing an academic paper should develop a good deal of knowledge on the appropriate use of diction.

In investigating their skill in using correct mechanics in their writing, 23 (32.85%) strongly agreed and the other 23(32.85%) agreed that they used different mechanical items for the right purpose correctly. This suggests that majority of the students did not have serious problems in using punctuations, capitalizations and spelling in their academic writing. Similarly, the examination in the document analysis showed that only 40% of the students had problem in using different mechanical items correctly.

The other part of the questionnaire requested the students to respond whether they had the trend of carrying out self-editing, revising and reviewing in their academic work before submitting to the evaluator. Accordingly, 23(32.85%) of them strongly agreed and 42(60%) agreed to the statement. This indicates that the vast majority of the students had the habit of self-editing before submitting one's work to their respective instructor. This trend is very essential as it is utilizable everywhere and any time when producing academic writing is mandatory, as in the case of exam writing.

The last item of the questionnaire asked the respondents whether they practise writing as a hobby. As we can see from the data, 32(45.71%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and 30(42.85) disagreed to the statement. As every scholar in the field recognizes, writing is one of the language skills which has always nexus with cognitive psychology. It is a language skill which requires the activation of the package of knowledge the person has as relentlessly as possible. Thus, unless frequent and meaningful practices are carried out, it is unthinkable to achieve this skill. Hence, the researcher recommends that there should be a writing centre at least at university level whose objective is to encourage different people who have interest to express themselves in writing.

4.3 Discussion of results from the analysis of the Semi-structured Interview
Key: *Resp₁____Respondent one, Resp₂__Respondent two, etc*

In responding to the item that asked the respondents to define what an academic writing is, 12 of them defined it as any writing that people produce for the purpose of academic purposes. Two of them, however, defined it with some detailed explanation stating that an academic writing is a type of genre that students produce by following the conventions established by the academia universally. On the basis of the above responses, we can see that the first definition is not fullfledged because not all materials that students produce may serve an academic purpose. Writing a technical report, for example, is not an integral part of an academic writing. Thus, majority of the students had problem in describing the nature of an academic writing.

The other item of the interview asked the respondents to list out the major requirements that they consider in developing their academic writing. Their responses are grouped into three categories: The first category (6 of the respondents) listed, idea organization, good grammar and reference. The second category (5of the respondents) responded as stating clear objectives, explaining the ideas in each paragraph with evidence and giving a good summary in the conclusion part. The third category (3of the respondents) pinpointed the requirements differently saying: clear introduction, well organized paragraphs in the body and clear summary in the conclusion. Moreover, the language should be grammatically correct and ideas that are borrowed from other sources should be clearly cited.

From the above definition we understand that the third group had more or less clear information about the components of an academic writing. The other two groups did not clearly indicate the basic requirements of an academic writing. This implies that the majority of the students did not have clear idea about the basic requirements of an academic writing.

The third item asked the respondents about their grammar skill. Almost all of them except two had the belief that the rank of their grammar skill is at "good" level. The other two, however, had the belief that their grammar skill is at "very good" level. When those students who rated their grammar skill "good" were asked to explain their reason for rating this level, their major reason was that they did not learn grammar and other language skills by competent English teachers when they were in secondary schools and colleges. Moreover, some of them disclosed that they did not have opportunity to get clear feedback on their grammatical errors. Thirdly, even if they learnt the grammar lesson at schools, they did not have opportunity to use that language item for communicative purposes. This result tells us that the teaching/learning of grammar in the Ethiopian context needs a special attention and paradigm shift.

The focus of the fourth item was to check the strategy of editing they used to check the quality of their academic papers. Accordingly, 11 of them confirmed that they used only self-editing strategy. When they explained the reasons they forwarded that most of the time there is time pressure to evaluate a friend's work and give comments. Moreover, most students do not want to show their work to others. In this regard Resp $_4$ remarked:

> *I am always working hard to make my work as outstanding as possible. I have also been successful so far. But, if I give my work to a friend for comment, I am sure I will face many confusions and I may not perform to the best of my capacity because sometimes there are students who deliberately want to discourage others to lift. up themselves in the group.*

Based on the data described above, we can suggest that peer editing is not a comfortable strategy to a large number of students to edit academic papers. Hence, instructors of different courses need to change the situation by sensitizing the students about the benefit of peer-feedback in developing quality academic work.

The other item of the interview was to see whether the students were accustomed to reflecting their own view on their writing. In their response, 10 of them remarked that unless the instructor asked them, they did not react to any of the argument that they presented for analysis in their academic writing. Four of them, however, explained that they often gave their own personal view based on the major argument they presented in their academic papers. However, these respondents pointed out that sometimes they encountered problems when they described their personal reflection in their academic writing. One of the constraints that they raised was that most of theories and facts that they discussed in their academic papers were so complicated that it was sometimes difficult for them to personally reflect. Resp $_5$ in connection to this forwarded:

> *I believe that reflection on what we discussed is important and shows our maturity in the area of the topic on which we produced academic paper. The problem is most of the theories and assumptions we discuss in our paper are very challenging to understand. If we try to give our own reflection, we are always scared not to distort or take wrong position. Moreover, some of us had been working in another professional area before we joined this programme. Therefore, ignoring personal reflection is the safer side.*

If we examine the above response with some details, we observe that the degree of complexity in the subject matter that they discussed in their academic paper deterred their courage not to reflect on their academic writing.

Secondly, as we understand from the data, some students did not have experience in TEFL area so that it is difficult to reflect personal views on the major points presented and discussed in their paper. The crux of the discussion is however difficult or complicated the content of the assignment is, understanding its gist through repetitive reading or discussions with friends is mandatory. If any academic paper is done with shallow understanding, it will be very difficult to say that such student is fit for postgraduate level of study. Secondly, if the purpose of the training aims at producing English teachers, it is a must to associate what theories explain and what is practically happening in our learning institutions. The reason is, hereafter each candidate is expected to be an expert in TEFL area, who can solve several problems that have connection with his/her profession.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the discussions of the findings in this study, the following conclusions were drawn.

- Among the academic papers selected for evaluation, 30 % of the students gave less attention to the subject matter of their academic writing. Their main focus was on idea organization and other surface-feature of the language. In the questionnaire also 41.41% of the respondents confirmed the limitation that they had in discussing strong subject matters in their academic writing.

- 52.8% of the academic papers selected for this study did not include personal reflections on the major arguments discussed. The same result was found out from the data in the questionnaire and the interview.

- In investigating the language ability of the students, 41.42% the students committed inconsistency errors, 37.14% of them fused errors, 34.28% of them sentence fragment errors and 91.42% them tense errors .The misuse of prepositions, gerunds, infinitives and mechanics was also found out far and wide in most papers.

- . As further investigations continued on the academic papers, 44.28% of the students had pitfalls in selecting appropriate words that suit the context under discussion. The data from the questionnaire similarly corroborated the same fact.

- 52. 85% of the students had problem in applying both in-text and out-text citations in their academic writings.

- Investigations from the data in the questionnaire showed that only 29(41.42%) of the respondents had awareness about the basic requirements of an academic writing. This implies that if students at this level had awareness problem about the attributes of an academic writing, there is a missing link between what we teach in writing and research classes and the students' actual performances.

- When the students' attitude was examined, the data in the questionnaire revealed that 53.72% of the students had negative attitude towards writing skill.

- 92.85% of the students carried out self editing to value the content of their academic written work. Regarding peer-editing, however, 92.8% of them confirmed that they did not use it as one strategy to improve the quality of their academic writing. The data from the interview similarly substantiated the same reality.

- 50% of the students did not have capacity to paraphrase ideas in their own English. This response signals that the students had difficulty to read a text and understand the gist and express ideas in one's own English. At this level of learning, especially in TEFL area, if such skills are very weak, the chance to succeed academically and at the end of the day teaching English at any academic level will suffer greatly with a variety of setbacks.

- 59.85% of the students witnessed that they did not have a skill of reading an academic text critically. The implication is that if students lack this skill, they are not able to process and personalize the information that they received from different reading sources.

- With regard to their ability in fighting plagiarization through genuine citation, 50% of the respondents responded that they cited the location of borrowed references appropriately.

- Finally, the data from the questionnaire indicated that 30(42.85%) of the respondents did not have a hobby of writing at their spare-time. Writing, especially in the context of foreign language, is the result of relentless and meaningful practices. Thus, unless students give time for personal writing, it is unthinkable to achieve this skill and use it for academic purposes.

When all of the findings in this study are evaluated meticulously, they convey strong message regarding the interconnection between academic writing skill and status of quality of education. The fact is that if the students' academic writing skill is below the standard, especially at postgraduate level, let alone improving the quality of education, understanding major concepts in each course becomes beyond the capacity of the students. Thus, it is possible to conclude that due to most students' deficiency in academic writing, the quality of education in all subject areas in general and English education in particular, is challenged seriously. Hence, working aggressively on students' language skills development must be a burning issue of our current academic practices.

VII.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Depending on the discussion of data secured   from different research tools and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were forwarded:

1. Academic writing requires continuous and purposeful practices. Thus, a new course whose focus is to enhance the students' academic writing and reading need to be designed at an advanced level and offered to TEFL students when they are in the first year programme.

2. Instructors of different courses in the postgraduate programme need to always spend few minutes in discussing some of the basic requirements of an academic writing and give their students relevant comments as frequently as possible after they evaluated their academic papers.

3. Individual effort by itself is not sufficient to develop academic writing skills. Hence, the experts in the field in Hawassa and other universities need to establish a writing center where any interested students write, get feedback and evaluate their progress.

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