

Needs Analysis of EFL Master Students when Writing for Research Purposes

دراسة احتياجات طلبة الماجستير لكتابة لأغراض بحثية

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- Abstract: Within academic settings, EFL students are struggling when putting pen to paper to write for research purposes. This may be because this type of writing is highly conventional, addressed to a targeted knowledgeable audience and aims to achieve a specific communicative purpose. Owing to this, this study attempts to conduct students' needs and to define their difficulties in respect to research writing. 49 Master 2 students, majoring in linguistics in the English department, M'sila University, to whom a questionnaire was addressed, constituted the sample of the work. The findings revealed that students, though generating positive attitude towards academic writing and research writing genres, face writing difficulties of linguistic and epistemological nature. The results also reflected students' urgent need for supervision assistance and research writing courses to improve their academic writing and raise their awareness of what research writing looks like. These findings could be an endeavor to design writing courses where the priority is given to students' academic needs and to selected contents that should target the conventions of research writing.

- Keywords: academic writing, discourse community, research conventions, research needs, research writing.

- الملخص: في الفضاء الأكاديمي، يعاني طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية عند وضع القلم على الورق للكتابة لأغراض البحث. قد يكون هذا بسبب ان هذا النوع من الكتابة يخضع لاتفاقيات وقواعد كما أنه موجه إلى جمهور واسع المعرفة لتحقيق غرض تواصل محدد. نتيجة لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد احتياجات وصعوبات الطلاب فيما يتعلق بالكتابة البحثية. وقد تم توجيه استبيان لتسعة وأربعين طالب ماستر 2، تخصص لسانيات بقسم الإنجليزية - جامعة المسيلة-والذين شكلوا عينة الدراسة. كشفت النتائج أن الطلاب _ على الرغم من موقفهم الإيجابي تجاه الكتابة الأكاديمية وأنواع الكتابة البحثية - يواجهون صعوبات ذات طبيعة لغوية ومعرفية. عكست النتائج أيضا حاجة الطلاب الملحة إلى مساعدة الأساتذة المشرفين وكذا دروس متخصصة في كتابة الأبحاث لتحسين كتابتهم الأكاديمية وزيادة وعيهم بما يميز الكتابة البحثية. يمكن أن تساعد هذه النتائج في تصميم دروس خاصة بالكتابة البحثية حيث تعطى الأولوية لاحتياجات الطلاب الأكاديمية ويراعى فيها انتقاء محتويات

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- الكلمات الرئيسية: الكتابة الأكاديمية، مجتمع الخطاب، اتفاقيات البحث، الاحتياجات البحثية، الكتابة البحثية.

- Introduction:

Academic writing/writing for research purposes has become an expanding field of research in all over the world. It receives much attention being a need and requirement for graduates to access the threshold of graduation and for scholars to publish their research papers in well ranked journals. For graduates, it is perceived as a daunting task that should be performed in due time for their educational achievement. Writing as a skill is highly approved to be the most difficult skill when learning a language compared to the other skills (Raimes, 1983; Tribble, 1996), and academic writing is said to be challenging to whoever puts pen to paper. To overcome this problem, students may use their meta-cognitive abilities to transfer literate practices from one setting to a new one (Flower, 1990); however, it should not be the case when writing for research purposes. Al Fadda (2012) argues that transformation is a shared writing difficulty encountered by EFL students. Such a difficulty is justified according to Klimova (2014, pp. 433-434) that "there are cultural differences in the way academic register is perceived and understood in different countries". Differences between the first language (L1) and the second or the foreign language, as well, may generate transfer hindrances and challenges for EFL students as novice researchers. This is consistent with Romer's (2009, p.99) view that "Native and non-Native apprentice academic writers develop their academic discourse competence in similar ways, and that Native speakers also have to learn the language (and phraseology) of academic writing" (as cited in Hyland, 2016, p. 62). It can be further justified by the fact that academic writing is no one mother tongue (Hyland, 2016), and that research writing is governed by conventions and requirements acting as gate keepers and ensuring the survival of the discourse community of researchers (Swales, 1998).

Students' difficulties when writing research genres may go beyond the boundaries of linguistic arena to rhetorical functions and communication issues

through reader-writer awareness. Once again, writing to knowledgeable readers makes the task more challenging for novice researchers. It is such an awareness of the reader's expectations that guides the novice researcher-writer to write the different sections of the research paper (Swales & Feak, 1994). Kaplen (2001) argues that academic writers need to be aware of what may be discussed, who has the competence and authority to write, to whom writing is addressed and under what circumstances, what appropriate genres writing may take, what does it communicate, and what arrangement of evidence is likely to appeal to the targeted audience. Other factors that cause a real challenge to EFL students are social and cognitive in nature. Negative attitudes towards the target culture, social and psychological barriers, shortage progressing in mastering the foreign language, and lack of motivation in learning are of the common factors affecting students' academic writing (Klimova, 2014; Myles, 2002).

In EFL writing contexts, students come to experience writing some research genres like proposals, dissertations and theses being end of term requirements. A thesis or a dissertation, as Swales (1990, p. 187) points out, "provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate some originality in identifying a topic and following up their insight with a more systematic piece of research work". It acts as a *rite de passage* through which students establish themselves in the targeted discourse community of academia. However, the question that positions itself in respect to what have been discussed: how much ready are EFL students to perform such a daunting task of writing a research genre like a dissertation? In respect to this question, very often a lack of ability to academically write and succeed has more to do with a lack of experiencing requirements and practices of university discourse and less to do with intelligence (Haggis, 2006).

In the specific area of writing for graduation, EFL/ESL students face some common difficulties when writing their proposals, dissertations or theses. Their difficulties may range from identifying the area of interest (the research topic) to data

analysis and interpretation of the results. A good number of studies conducted worldwide shed light on these challenges. Todd et al. (2006) found those intellectual problems such as time management and how to choose and narrow down the research scope as highly challenging. Another study conducted by Wang and Li (2008), in Australia, addressed a group of international postgraduate students writing their theses and revealed that pedagogical shortfalls and lack of intercultural sensitivity in students' supervision were main research hindrances. Manchishi et al. (2015) investigated the difficulties generated by teachers and postgraduate students at the Zambia University. The findings reported that while writing proposals students encounter the following: broad an ambiguous topic, problems in research methodology, problems in reviewing the literature, misunderstanding of research terminology, lack of adequate feedback from supervisors, and problems with time management. Komba (2016) reviewed 103 research reports including 39 theses and 64 dissertations from three universities in Tanzania to investigate postgraduate students' challenges in writing the two genres. The study reported that challenges include inappropriate presentation of chapters and lack of academic writing skills. In another study about research writing challenges, Caddman (1997) attributed the main difficulties shared by students while writing their theses and dissertations to different epistemologies they had experienced and in which their identities were rooted

In Arab academic contexts, many studies have been conducted to figure out academic and research writing hindrances (Al Badi, 2015; Al-Qaderi, 2016; Qasem & Zayid, 2019). Similar to the findings lately discussed, it is concluded that EFL/ESL students main difficulties are related to cohesion, coherence, language use, writing own voice, finding relevant topics and resources, and skills in referencing and citations, lack of time, lack of knowledge about methodology, students' weak academic level, and students' negative attitudes towards research projects.

While academic research writing challenges facing students worldwide are common and similar, no exception can be made for EFL Algerian students. As in many

universities over the globe, in Algerian universities submitting a dissertation for master graduation by the end of the term is a requirement. Being a member of academic staff in one of the Algerian universities, the author of this article has experienced teaching, supervising, and examining EFL students at Master degree. It was noticed that students had serious problems when conducting their research works, stretching from planning to writing the different sections of the dissertation. This is a shared experience by most permanent teachers who described their views as negative concerning the quality of the works written and submitted by students.

Though it is evident from previous studies that writing for research purposes is highly demanding and challenging for the majority of students worldwide, the need to investigate EFL Algerian students' attitudes, difficulties, and needs in respect to academic research writing urges itself. It is in fact the limited knowledge on the type and scope of such challenges and difficulties that motivates the current study. Therefore, the study seeks to answer the following questions :

1. How do students perceive the writing task?
2. To what extent do students face academic writing difficulties?
3. What are students' research writing needs?

It is assumed hereby that once attitudes, difficulties, and needs are identified, designing remedial research writing courses will be an effective next step. It will be of great help for Algerian students and teachers alike to generate enough knowledge about issues related to writing research genres. Noticeably enough, the findings would suggest valuable recommendations for the whole academic staff to elevate the situation of teaching research writing and to overcome whatever difficulties faced by students.

1.Academic Writing:

In recent years, there is a serious interest in the area of academic writing and the challenges faced by graduates and novice researchers in their ESL/EFL contexts. The decision of what is considered good and acceptable English is a matter of rules

and conventions set by the academic discourse community. Before setting pen to paper in academic contexts, student writers should be knowledgeable enough about this type of writing, to whom it is addressed, and the communicative purposes it serves. Academic writing is defined by Swales (1990) as a socio-rhetorical community of both writers and readers sharing some communicative purposes, conventions, and socialization processes on the genre analysis basis. This indicates that academic writing requires some epistemologies essential to have access, and to effectively communicate with a particular discourse members. For instance, student writers need to learn the literacy of academia to ensure success as academic writers. They "need to learn what knowledge is valued, what questions can be asked, and who is allowed to ask while at the same time learning what they know and how to write what they know" (Badenhorst et al. 2014, p. 02). Similar to this is what Kamler and Threadgold (1997) view as mandatory for ESL/EFL students to generate background knowledge, values, and understandings they will share with their readers. They argue that "students will discover, impacts on how much 'display of knowledge' their texts should contain, to what extent they should 'show what they know', as well as what issues they should address, what boundaries they can cross, and how they might do this.(as cited in Paltridge, 2007).

In university contexts, academic success is tightly related to students' academic writing ability (Campell, 1990; Madhavi, 2013). Central to this is to approach academic writing as contextual, intertextual and citational process. This type of writing entails a style of expression researchers should regard to cope with the epistemologies of their fields and their areas of expertise. It can be understood that academic writing is a type of English register used by scientists and scholars to address a knowledgeable audience and to communicate for a specific purpose. In reference to the type of knowledge students should arm themselves with, three sets are recommended. These are stated by Tribble (1996) as: content and context knowledge, language system knowledge, and appropriate writing processes knowledge. These types qualify student

writers to shift from conserving knowledge to critiquing, questioning, judging and extending knowledge. This permits a shift from correctness, summarizing and describing information to originality and to the creation of new knowledge (Paltridge, 2007).

In discussing academic writing characteristics, it is the communicative purpose of academic texts that imposes a set of characteristics. Rather than entertaining, academic genres are meant for informing, judging, arguing, and creating new knowledge. Particular skills of summarizing and critiquing using appropriate evaluating and reporting verbs is a major demand in academic writing. Acknowledging authors ideas strengthens the student writers' claims on the subject under investigation and proves his/her truthfulness and responsibility. It helps students escape the risk of plagiarism. These features and others like complexity, formality, objectivity, explicitness, precision, accuracy, and hedging are distinctive to the academic register. Other features related to the writing process like coherence, cohesion, and mechanics are crucial to academic writing as well.

2. Research Written Genres: How and What for?

As stated earlier, this type of writing students should appeal to is highly conventional and demanding. ESL/EFL students may be more familiar with personal and narrative writing but little is known about factual and expository writing. They come to university life without prerequisite knowledge of what characterizes writing in this new context. Occasionally, their expertise is said to be less than adequate. Their writing experience tends not to exceed writing a paragraph or an essay; however, seeking acceptance within the discourse of academia sets them to write longer texts like research proposals, dissertations, and theses. Though there is a growing interest in academic writing in recent years, writing for research purposes receives little attention. For instance, dissertations and theses as research genres have been avoided by genre analysts because of the daunting size of the typical texts (Dudley-Evans, 1999; Swales, 2004). Adding to that, though many publications were devoted to instructing novices

how to write different research genres, an in-class practice that sets students to write these genres remains a discrepancy. In many academic contexts, when students are assigned to write a dissertation or a thesis, they are dependent on their supervisors to explain how such a genre looks like. However, "supervisors are rarely taught how to supervise and many rely on their own experiences of supervision as ideal to emulate" (Badenhorst et al. 2014, p. 03). They often do not know how to teach research writing and they find it difficult to articulate the many fluid discursive practices that remain hidden and tacit. All these facts reflect academic research writing for novice researchers as a problem in need of fixing.

Conducting a research is "a process of inquiry and investigation; it is systematic, methodical and ethical; research can help solve practical problems and increase knowledge" (Neville, 2004, p.1). Research student writers, preoccupied with the complexity of the writing process, are often concerned with the questions of thinking, learning, knowing, engaging, positioning, becoming and writing that constitute their extended experience of research degree candidature and their transaction with thesis text "(Aitchison & Lee, 2006, p. 268). As is the case in most universities in the world, writing an advanced academic genre like a dissertation or a thesis is a requirement for students to achieve a degree. Integral to that is writing a research proposal about the investigated topic. These research genres are written by novices to experts to demonstrate an argument about a certain topic. According to Paltridge (2007), universities and examiners expect a set of points from students' theses and dissertations. There should be a kind of understanding and critical appraisal of previous studies on the topic. Students should make appropriate use of research methods and thorough presentation and interpretation of results. Of equal importance to this is to write appropriate conclusions and interpretations, and to effectively contribute to knowledge on the research topic.

As a requirement for a higher degree, research articles are written by experts to experts to seek acceptance for publication in international journals. Writing for

international publication presents challenges for both Anglophone and non-Anglophone researchers (Casanave & Vandrik, 2003; Hynninen & Kuteeva, 2017; Swales, 2004). It is regarded by Hyland (2016) as a specialized competence that both Native and non-Native speakers must acquire (p. 61). Once again, this may just confirm how demanding the task of writing a research genre is. Put in the words of a study-participant conducted by Kuteeva (2015), academic writing is "nobody's land". However, due to the thorough research by genre analysts on this research genre, novice scholars are well armed with the conventions that make their articles appealing to experts and ready for publication. They need considerable scaffolding before writing independently and conventionally. Swales' CARS model, (1990), facilitates the task for authors seeking to publish in well ranked international journals. It acts as an outline, though open to modifications of some moves and mainly of some steps in respect to disciplines, through which publishers communicate their arguments and contribute to knowledge.

Novice researchers, then, should be knowledgeable about the landscape of research writing to successfully place themselves as members of the discourse community of academics. In short, academic research writing is addressed to knowledgeable audience who are aware enough about the conventions that regulate academic texts to achieve a certain communicative function. This is perfectly described by Hoey (2001) who "likens readers and writers to dancers following each other's steps, each assembling sense from a text by anticipating what the author is likely to do by making connections to prior texts."(as cited in Hyland, 2007, p. 150)

3. Methodology

3.1- Research Design:

To explore students' perceived needs towards the task of writing and, mainly, to define their difficulties and challenges when writing for research purposes, the researcher opts for a descriptive study. The main aim of the study remains descriptive as the intention is to provide a picture of the specific details of the situation of research

writing from learners' perspective. This quantitative study intends to conduct the students' needs (the lacks, the wants, the necessities) and recommend academic and research writing instructors to prioritize those needs in the task of course design. This study assumes that considering students' learning needs as far as their attitudes towards putting pen to paper are concerned is rewarding. Of equal importance is to define students weaknesses and strengths in academic writing and to know about their priorities when writing research genres.

3-2- Research Subjects:

EFL Master students majoring in the field of linguistics at M'sila University were asked to take part in the study. A questionnaire was administered to 49 students who composed the sample of the study. This study opts for a purposive sampling as the participants are graduates who should submit a dissertation, being a compulsory task, as a partial fulfillment of the requirement for Master degree. In the journey of writing this research genre, students encounter serious problems that result in the inadequate shape of writing. To this end, the subjects of the study may provide valuable data and explicitly define the research writing needs.

3.3- Research instrument:

A questionnaire, based on five-point Likert scale items, consists of the main instrument of the current study. It includes 13 items for the sake of providing a plethora of academic writing needs. It includes three main sections that correlate with students' attitudes and perceptions towards the task of writing, their difficulties and challenges in academic writing, and their target needs as far as writing research genres is concerned (as indicated in the appendix). As for the validity of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted through submitting it to 15 participants to complete and two experts to validate. After some modifications, it was distributed to master linguistics students who constitute the sample of the current study.

3.4-Data analysis procedures:

The questionnaire data elicited from the participants were analyzed quantitatively to determine the students' present, learning and target needs as far as academic and research writing skills are concerned. Using the SPSS program, the descriptive statistics were implemented to encode the participants' responses to the Likert scale items as represented in table 1, 2, and 3, bellow.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1- Findings:

This section will illustrate the questionnaire's findings and try to give answers to the research questions inserted earlier.

Table 1. Students' Attitudes towards the writing task

Statements	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
1. I like academic writing assignments	49	3.6327	0.8586	5.15	.000
2. I find one hour and a half per-week sufficient for the writing course	49	1.9184	0.1037	-7.29	.000
3. I can easily find good academic words and expressions	49	2.8163	1.0542	-1.22	.22
4. I prefer to look for a writing model before I start to write an academic text	49	4.0408	0.9991	7.29	.000
5. I feel proud when I receive positive comments on my writing	49	3.7959	1.0404	5.35	.000
Total		3.24	0.44	3.75	.000

In respect to the t value ($t=3.75$) and with a p-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05, we conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the hypothesized mean ($=3$) and the students' responses mean (mean=3.24). Therefore, the results in general indicate that students generate positive attitudes towards the writing task mainly in item 4, 5.1 with a mean of 4.04; 3.79; 3.63 respectively.

However, students expressed their dissatisfaction with the time allotted to the writing course with a mean of 1.91 as they express a difficulty to find good academic words and expressions with a mean of 2.81.

Knowing about the students' learning needs before any teaching/learning program takes place is an effective step. If we assume that needs analysis is the core principle in designing a course, learning needs analysis is the core principle of needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This may explain that students' difficulties and weak writing performance in academic writing are not direct results of their attitudes towards the writing process.

Table 2. Students' difficulties in academic writing

Statements	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
6. I find it difficult to write an academic text	49	4.1837	0.7819	10.59	.000
7. I find it difficult to use the following aspects of academic writing:	49	3.8980	0.8227	7.64	.000
a) formality		3.2041	1.0602	1.34	.18
b) precision		3.9184	0.7313	8.79	.000
c) accuracy		4.1042	0.6601	11.58	.000
d) objectivity		2.7347	0.8360	-2.22	.031
e) hedging		3.4082	1.1165	2.55	0.14
f) citing					
8. I find writing for academic research in English difficult in the following:	49	3.1000	0.6806	1.02	.30
a) finding a research topic		3.3469	1.3776	1.76	.08
b) reviewing related literature		3.3061	1.1583	1.85	.07
c) stating the study rationale		2.8571	0.9128	-1.09	.27
d) organizing the study		2.8367	1.1428	-1.00	.32
e) writing the general introduction		3.4792	1.1483	2.89	.006
f) writing the abstract	2.9375	0.9764	-.44	.65	
Total		3.38	.34	7.81	.000

Table 2 demonstrates and identifies students' academic writing difficulties. Regarding the value of t (7.81) and as evidenced by the significant difference between the hypothesized mean(=3) and the students' responses mean(=3.38) at the level of p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, we can conclude that students face difficulties

in academic writing to a high degree. With the highest mean of 4.18, students agree that writing an academic text is challenging. When it comes to students' difficulties in mastering some aspects of academic writing, objectivity receives the highest mean of 4.10 followed by accuracy (mean=3.91); formality (mean=3.89); citing (mean=3.40); and finally, precision with a mean of 3.20. Nevertheless, students express less difficulty with hedging though their academic writing, generally, is characterized by the overuse of very strong claims and by the lack of cautious words and expressions. Hereby, probably, either the students are not knowledgeable enough about this aspect of research writing, or they are unaware of the power of hedging techniques to tone down strong statements and reduce the risk of opposition.

As far as writing for research purposes, being an advanced level of academic writing, students difficulties are arranged according to the higher means from writing the general introduction (3.47) and finding a research topic (mean=3.34) to reviewing related literature (mean=3.30). However, students express less difficulty in stating the study rationale (mean=2.85), organizing the study (mean=2.83) and writing the abstract (mean=2.93).

Table 3. Students needs in writing for research purposes

Statements	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
9. I need to develop my academic writing for research purposes	49	4.5510	0.7377	14.71	.000
10. I need to write the following research genres/subgenres:		3.2000	0.8185	1.71	.09
a) Dissertation	49	3.1224	1.3939	.61	.54
b) Research article		2.1224	1.1837	-5.18	.000
c) Research proposal		4.0816	0.8123	9.32	.000
d) General introduction/conclusion		3.4694	1.4009	2.34	.023
e) Abstract		3.2041	1.4574	.98	.33
11. As a novice researcher, I need to be aware of the following:		3.8041	0.5809	9.68	.000
a) knowledge of my audience	49	3.5714	1.1547	3.46	.001
		3.8163	0.7266	7.86	.000

b) the communicative purpose		4.0000	0.7905	8.85	.000
c) the language features (lexis and grammar)		3.4898	0.9600	3.57	.001
d) the research conventions		4.1429	0.8660	9.23	.000
e) the importance and roles both introductions and abstracts play in a research paper					
12. I need my supervisor's feedback to improve my academic research writing	49	4.5510	0.6474	16.76	.000
13. I feel the urgent need that writing courses at university should focus on teaching research writing	49	4.2857	1.0408	8.64	.000
Total		3.73	0.45	11.29	.000

In table 3, students express their needs when they write for research purposes. Regarding the value of t that equals 11.29, and with a p -value of 0.000, it is evident that there is a statistically significant difference between the hypothesized mean ($=3$) and the students' responses mean ($=3.73$). Noticeably, most students express their need to develop their academic writing for research purposes with a high mean of 4.55. When it comes to their needs in writing some research genres, research proposal receives the highest mean (4.08) followed by dissertation (Mean=3.12). General introductions and abstracts, as subgenres, get the mean of 3.46 and 3.20 respectively. Meanwhile, writing a research article, being not a requirement for master graduation, receives the lowest mean (2.12).

Other needs related to writing research writing genres/subgenres are also represented in the table. As novice researchers students express their need to be knowledgeable about the importance and roles of introductions and abstracts in a research genre (mean=4.14), the language features (mean=4.00), the communicative purpose of the research genre (mean=3.81), knowledge of the genre audience (mean=3.57), and the research conventions that regulate the genre (3.48).

Interestingly, students highly agree on the need for supervisors' feedback to improve their academic research writing with a mean of 4.55. Last but not least, with a significant mean of 4.28, students demonstrate their urgent need that writing courses at university should focus on teaching research writing.

4.2- Discussion:

The participants' responses provided intriguing insights on the perceptions, difficulties and needs once students put pen to paper for research writing purposes. The study identifies a plethora of needs that could be a reliable platform for any research writing teaching program. As indicated in table 1, students' positive attitudes towards the writing task may reflect their motivation to take the writing course and deny any wrong claims that students generally do not feel at ease to learn the writing skill. This may be further confirmed by their dissatisfaction with the duration of the writing course being one hour and half per week. As a productive skill, writing is not a one-off process; rather, it needs ongoing practice to improve students' performance.

Concerning academic writing difficulties, the results confirm students' difficulty when writing an academic text mainly in aspects like: objectivity, accuracy, formality, precision, citation and hedging. These features are fundamental to maintaining the tone and voice of academic discourse (Hyland, 1997; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017). Not only was it difficult for students to cope with the conventions that characterize the entire academic text; however, it was also difficult for them to cope with cognitive skills when writing a research genre. It is challenging for them to find a research topic, review relevant literature, and write some subgenres like the general introduction. Similar difficulties were expressed in previous studies conducted elsewhere as indicated in the introduction section of this article (Al Badi, 2015; Al-Qaderi, 2016; Todd, Smith & Bannister, 2006; Komba, 2016; Qasem & Zayid, 2019).

Through identifying students' research writing needs, it is clear enough from the findings that students need to write different research genre/subgenres like research proposals, dissertations, general introductions and abstracts, being

requirements in their last year of master graduation. In terms of content and context-knowledge needs, the findings show that students need to know the communicative purpose of the research genre/subgenre and to know about the targeted audience the genre/subgenre is addressing. Other needs regarding language system knowledge (academic vocabulary and grammar) and research conventions knowledge are also highly recommended by students.

As far as students' need for their supervisors' support, "it is through feedback that the supervisor communicates and provides advanced academic training, particularly in writing, to the supervisee" (kumar & Stracke, 2007, p. 462). Writing a research genre, for graduates, needs the assistance of the supervisor that starts from choosing a significant research topic to submitting and defending the work. As indicated in the findings, students express their need for their supervisor's feedback to develop their research writing skills. Occasionally, lack of training for supervisors and the load in the number of supervisees may not permit constant and critical feedback. This may justify the focus of supervisors on problems with the sentence and paragraph levels (linguistic accuracy), in students' dissertations, and ignore giving critical feedback on methodology and content. One solution that could overcome such discrepancies is that writing courses at university should focus on teaching research writing contents as highly approved by most students (table 3). Interestingly enough, the participants of the current research show an awareness of their research writing needs. To this end, taking these needs as priority before any course design is the responsibility of writing teachers in the first place.

5- Conclusion:

By analyzing graduate students preferences, difficulties, and target needs, it is worth noting that the participants perceive writing for research purposes as a daunting task. Their difficulties are not limited to linguistic knowledge but they include intellectual awareness of the nature and scope of academic writing too. Interestingly, the study came up with ambitious results with respect to students'

motivation to take the writing course, and their awareness of research writing needs. These findings could help writing teachers, course designers, and supervisors to generate an idea about the situation of academic writing from a learner's perspective. The study recommends the primacy of needs analysis before any teaching/learning program takes place. It further recommends that if universities and institutions want to minimize the writing challenges students encounter, there should exist collaboration between research methodology teachers and academic writing teachers to design courses tailored according to a needs analysis process.

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