An Investigation into The Challenges of Writing Research Project at The Departments of English in Iraqi Kurdistan Region Universities from The Students' Perception

Shano Mahmood Kareem[1], Barham Sattar Abdulrahman[2]

[1]Department of English, College of Education and Language, Charmo University, Sulaimaniya, Iraq

[2]Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Sulaimani, Sulaimaniya, Iraq

Email: shano.mahmood@charmouniversity.org[1], barham.abdulrahman@univsul.edu.iq[2]

Abstract:

The present study aims to investigate the challenges Kurdish senior EFL students face while writing graduation research projects at the departments of English in Iraqi Kurdistan Region universities. The study hypothesizes that the majority of Kurdish EFL undergraduates face challenges while writing their research projects and the challenges could be related to lack of knowledge on paraphrasing, plagiarism, referencing, citation, research design, lack of practice, and poor supervision. To investigate the study hypothesis, the researcher designs a 29-item questionnaire which is distributed among 218 senior students of Department of English, College of Basic Education at four different Iraqi Kurdistan Region universities, namely University of Sulaimani, Salahaddin University-Erbil, University of Halabja, and University of Duhok during the academic year 2021-2022. The collected data is statistically analyzed using SPSS version 24 focusing on frequency, percentage, standard deviation, relevant importance, and level. The study concludes that the majority of problems the students face during writing the research projects is related to a lack of interest in research, experience and practice, good knowledge of the methodology, and positive and effective feedback. Finally, it recommends EFL instructors/supervisors to provide the students with feedback and opportunity to practice, guide them avoiding plagiarism, and teach them academic writing.

Keywords: Challenges, Department of English, Research Projects, Kurdish EFL Students**.**

الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقيق من التحديات التي يواجهها طلاب المرحلة الرابعة الكورد متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية أثناء كتابة مشاريع أبحاث التخرج في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعات إقليم كوردستان العراق. تفترض الدراسة أن غالبية الطلاب الجامعيين الكورد متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية يواجهون تحديات أثناء كتابة مشاريعهم البحثية ويمكن أن تكون التحديات مرتبطة بنقص المعرفة حول إعادة الصياغة، السرقة الادبيه، المراجع، تصميم البحث، نقص الممارسة، وضعف الإشراف. وللتحقق من فرضية الدراسة، قام الباحثون بتصميم استبيان مكون من 29 فقرة موزعة على 218 طالبًا متقدمًا في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية الأساسية في أربع جامعات مختلفة في إقليم كوردستان العراق، وهي جامعة السليمانية، جامعة صلاح الدين- أربيل، جامعة حلبجة، وجامعة دهوك خلال العام الدراسي 2021-2022. يتم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها إحصائيًا باستخدام الإصدار 24 من SPSS مع التركيز على التردد والنسبة المئوية والانحراف المعياري والأهمية ذات الصلة والمستوى. خلصت الدراسة إلى أن غالبية المشاكل التي يواجهها الطلاب أثناء كتابة المشاريع البحثية تتعلق بعدم الاهتمام بالبحث والخبرة والممارسة، المعرفة الجيدة بالمنهجية، وردود الفعل الإيجابية والفعالة. أخيرًا، توصي الدراسة المدرسين/المشرفين اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية بتزويد الطلاب بالتغذية الراجعة وفرصة الممارسة، توجيههم لتجنب الانتحال، وتعليمهم الكتابة الأكاديمية.

پوختە:

ئەم توێژینەوەیە ئامانجی لێکۆڵینەوەیە لەو ئاڵەنگارییانەی خوێندکارانی کورد لە پۆلی چوارەم کە ئینگلیزیی وەکو زمانێکی بیانی دەخوێنن لە کاتی نووسینی پرۆژەباسی دەرچوون لە بەشی زمانی ئینگلیزی لە زانکۆکانی هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراق تووشی دەبن. توێژینەوەکە گریمانەی ئەوە دەکات زۆرینەی خوێندکارانی کورد کە ئینگلیزیی وەکو زمانێکی بیانی دەخوێنن لە کاتی نووسینی پرۆژەباسی دەرچوون رووبەرووی ئاستەنگ دەبنەوە و دەشێت ئەم ئاڵەنگارییانە پەیوەستبکرێنەوە بە کەمیی زانیاریی لەسەر پارافرایزکردن، دزیکردن، نووسینی سەرچاوە و کتێب، نەخشەو پلانی توێژینەوە، نەبوونی پراکتیک، و سستی سەرپەرشتی کردن. بۆ بەدواداچوونی گریمانەی توێژینەوەکە، توێژەران راپرسییەکەی ٢٩ برگەییان داناوە کە بەسەر ٢١٨ خوێندکاری پۆلی چوارەمی بەشی ئینگلیزی، کۆلێژی پەروەردەی بنەرەتی لە چوار زانکۆی جیاوازی هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراق دابەشکراوە کە بریتیین لە زانکۆی سلێمانی، زانکۆی سەڵاحەدین-هەولێر، زانکۆی هەڵەبجە، و زانکۆی دهۆک لە ساڵی خوێندنی ٢٠٢١-٢٠٢٢. داتا کۆکراوەکان ئاماریانە شیکاری دەکرێن بە بەکارهێنانی بەرنامەی ئێسپیئێسئێس، وەشانی ٢٤، کە گرنگی بە دووبارەبووە، رێژەی سەدی، لادانی ستاندارد، گرنگی پەیوەندیدار و ئاست دەدات. توێژینەوەکە دەگات بەو ئەنجامەی کە زۆربەی ئەو کێشانەی خوێندکاران لە کاتی نووسینی پرۆژەکانی توێژینەوەدا رووبەروویان دەبێتەوە، پەیوەندیان بە کەمیی حەزی توێژینەوەکردن و کەمیی ئەزموون و پراکتیک و نەبوونی زانیاری باش لەسەر مێتۆدۆلۆژیا و نەبوونی فیدباکی ئەرێنی وکاریگەرەوە هەیە. لە کۆتاییدا، توێژینەوەکە پێشنیازدەکات تا مامۆستایان/سەرپەرشتیاران فیدباک و دەرفەتی پراکتیزمکردن بدەن بە خوێندکاران، رێنماییان بکەن بە دوورکەوتنەوە لە دزیکردن، و فێری نووسینی ئەکادیمییان بکەن.

کلیلە وشە: ئاڵەنگارییەکان، بەشی ئینگلیزی، پرۆژەباسی دەرچوون، توێژینەوە، خوێندکارانی کورد کە ئینگلیزی وەکو زمانێکی بیانی دەخوێنن.

1. Introduction

Writing is the most difficult skill for learners; Musa (2010, cited in Al Mubarak 2017) asserts that mastery of spelling and punctuation, a detailed command of grammar, the appropriate use of vocabulary, a style appropriate to achieve the expected expectations of readers, and organizational skills are all essential parts of writing. Furthermore, Byrne (1991) claims that writing requires lots of time to learn and it also requires conscious mental effort which it is a difficult task for learners.

According to Bocar (2013, cited in Alsied and Ibrahim 2017), research is the process of gathering data, analyzing it, and interpreting it, as well as see if the findings can be used. Adamu, (2020) states that research project writing is one of the most important requirements for final year students in every institution. This project is normally managed for one year or in the last semester of the final year. Students need to write and complete a final year project to fulfil the requirements of getting bachelor. In addition, Dillon (2013) claims that an undergraduate student's research project is most likely be the longest single piece of work they will ever create. The project is normally written in the last year and obtains an important number of points and is frequently utilized to discriminate between normal and honors degrees.

Despite the significance of project writing, it is clear that students consistently consider it challenging especially in EFL context due to the research steps and procedures that cost money, take long time, and require effort. In Iraqi Kurdistan Region (Henceforth IKR) universities, the students face many challenges regarding graduation research project; these challenges could be related to the supervisors, the writing process, the research methodology course, the students' lack of sufficient knowledge and practice.

The current study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the main challenges that Kurdish EFL university students face in writing graduation research project?
2. To what extent does the course content affect the students' academic written performance?

2. The Concept of Research

According to Neville, (2007), research is "a process of enquiry and investigation; it is systematic, methodical and ethical; research can help solve practical problems and increase knowledge."   For Pandey and Pandey (2015), the term "research" is made up of two words: "re" and "search." It means looking for something new. Krause (2021) states research writing refers to the process of persuading readers about a topic by using evidence from journals, books, magazines, the internet, and experts. Moreover, for Kumar (2011) research is a way of thinking and studying various topics of knowledge to understand the specific subject and assess theories aiming at development and advancement in the profession. Leedy and Ormrod (2015) also have a definition of research, which is a method of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data to gain a richer knowledge of a topic that we are interested in or worried about.

3. Graduation Research Project and Its Significance

Undergraduate research projects refer to the departmental projects intended to encourage students to research, examine and express results in ways that help them comprehend the methods used in the topic to produce new knowledge and creative thinking. As Bently and Kyvik (2013, cited in Simuforosa M. et al. 2015) point out, this project requires hardworking, being serious, and systematic examination with the purpose of uncovering, rewriting, and interpreting facts and theories.

MacKeogh (2006) claims that through undertaking a research project, students can demonstrate their writing skills. These lead students to acquire useful research skills such as identifying researchable topics, problem-solving technique, critical thinking, and analytical and statistical skills. Additionally, Todd et al. (2004) believe that the main characteristics of the undergraduate research project are the choice of topic, independent learning, proposal preparation, data collection, data analysis, research ethics, and writing up findings. Thus, the research project works for two purposes; it might be used as an assessment tool as well as a tool for learning.

4. Challenges EFL Students Face in Writing Research Project

Writing a research project requires a lot of work and effort, it is not an easy process. Additionally, a lot of time and good background knowledge are required. Kurdish students face a variety of challenges in writing their research projects; paraphrasing and plagiarism are among the major ones. Snodgrass and Bevevino (2005, cited in Zangenehmadar & Hoon 2014) state that the majority of students, particularly new students, plagiarize without realizing that they are cheating. Most often, fresh college students are less knowledgeable about proper academic writing and may not be aware that plagiarism is forbidden in academia. **To paraphrase,** As **Gillett et al. (2009) suggest, the writer must change the original's words and structure while maintaining the meaning.**

Generally speaking, citation and referencing are two challenges EFL university students face. This is because they do not have enough knowledge about proper citation and referencing. In other words, the majority of them do not know how to properly cite sources and references to improve their writing. According to O' Hara (2005), the author's statements or ideas must be cited/referenced. This also can be done in a variety of ways, including footnotes, endnotes (reference lists), and in-text citations. Furthermore, Lamptey and Atta-Obeng (2012) state that citations and references fulfil other crucial responsibilities in addition to serving as a means of preventing plagiarism. Citation and referencing of a published work show researcher's respects to intellectual property rights.

Another challenge that EFL students face is related to research design, which includes the five chapters of a research project: introduction, literature review, methodology, result, and conclusions. Additionally, Bowen and Mark (1994 cited in Javed M. 2019) believe that writing a research study in a second language is an extremely challenging task. For Kurdish EFL students, writing most parts of a research project in English is difficult. Students should consider not only the arrangement and content of the research project but the language, too. According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), writing academically in English is certainly different from writing academically in other native language. The vocabulary, grammar, and the way of arranging ideas are may be dissimilar from what others are used to. No one can deny that Kurdish EFL students have some challenges with academic writing. One of the difficulties is relevant to the correct usage of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling.

Ifeoma (2019) claims that students may face difficulties due to a lack of interaction from supervisors or inadequate guidance. Undergraduate students have little background in their given field of research, so supervisors must supervise and guide them appropriately to be productive in the process and keep their interest. Moreover, some students do not know how to properly write research projects and lack of supervision makes the students' work very difficult and then they finish the research project with poor quality. Thus, it is necessary that undergraduate students receive proper mentoring. Finally, lack of scientific training and lack of experience and skills necessary to conduct scientific research are two prominent challenges in this regard. Though many would have completed a research technique course, they frequently face a "transfer-of-learning" difficulty, in which they fail to apply theoretical research knowledge to reality. The research methodology used differs from study to study, and students who are not familiar in all the methodological elements find difficulty in writing research.

5. The Study Instrument and Data Collection

To find out the writing research project challenges faced by Kurdish EFL undergraduate students, a questionnaire is designed to explore several problems in this regard. The study instrument consists of 29 Likert-scale items in which the students are required to show to what extent they dis/agree with the given items. For each single item the study sample is given five options: strongly disagree, disagree, not decided, agree, and strongly agree.

Regarding the data collection procedure, the researchers distribute the questionnaire at the University of Sulaimani and Salahaddin University-Erbil. To save time and effort, the researchers designed a Google Form to send the questionnaire to the senior students of Department of English, College of Basic Education at University of Halabja, and University of Duhok.

5.1 The Study Sample

The sample of the study is 218 fourth year students at the English Departments, Colleges of Basic Education at four IKR universities: University of Sulaimani, Salahaddin University-Erbil, University of Halabja, and University of Duhok during the academic year 2021-2022. The students are selected randomly.

Table 1: Distribution of the Study Sample

University	Frequency	%
University of Sulaimani	70	32.1
Salahaddin University-Erbil	81	37.2
University of Duhok	40	18.3
University of Halabja	27	12.4
Total	218	100.0

5.2 Validity and Reliability of the Study Instrument

Concerning the validity of the study instrument, the researchers send the questionnaire to number of national and internals experts in the field of Applied Linguistics, Academic Writing, and TESOL. The researchers take the expert's comments, notes, suggestions and recommendations into consideration; the instrument is changed by the researchers and only 29 items remained. Furthermore, a pilot study is applied to investigate the difficulties the students face in answering the questionnaire items.

With regard to the questionnaire reliability, alpha-Cronbach has been used for testing the reliability of the questionnaire; the tool obtained 0.919 which confirms that items of the questionnaire are reliable and acceptable since 0.919 is greater than 0.7 Cronbach's Alpha values. Hence, Cronbach's alpha built on the standardised item is 0.919 demonstrates that the reliability of the research instrument is certainly acceptable.

Table 1: The Value of the Alpha Cronbach's Coefficient

Variables	N. of Class	Alpha Cronbach's
Challenges Related to Research Design	7	0.876
Challenges Connected with Paraphrasing & Plagiarism	4	0.951
Challenges Relevant to Citation & Referencing	3	0.923
Challenges Relevant to Academic Writing	7	0.907
Challenges Relevant to Supervisor	2	0.933
Challenges Relevant to Research Methodology Course	6	0.926
Total	29	0.919

6. Results and Data Analysis

6.1 Challenges Related to Research Design

According to the collected data, the total weighted arithmetic means of the *Challenges Related to Research Design* dimension reached 3.56, with standard deviation of 1.05, and the relative importance amounted to 71.27% with high level.

The total arithmetic mean appeared greater than the hypothetical mean (i.e., 3), which indicates that challenges related to research design dimension approved by the Kurdish EFL university students.

In addition, the total percentage of students who responded with Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Decided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree is 18.81%, 42.92%, 18.41%, 15.53%, and 4.33% successively. However, it is clear from table 3 that item that *I choose the topic of my graduation research* has obtained the highest percentage, as the weighted arithmetic mean is 3.93, Standard Deviation (SD) is 1.04, and Relative Important (RI) is 78.53%. While the item *I select my research methodology on my own without the help of my supervisor* has achieved the lowest percentage, with mean of 2.96, SD of 1.23 and RI of 59.17%. Statistically speaking, some of the items represented in table 3 got higher percentages than others, as the weighted arithmetic mean values ranged between 2.96- 3.93 which is a good and high percentage.

This indicates that research design is a challenge that the majority of Kurdish EFL university students face.

Table 3: Description of Challenges Related to Research Design

Items	SD	D	ND	A	SA	Mean (SD)	RI	Level
	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.			
	%	%	%	%	%			
I choose the topic of my graduation research	8	19	22	101	68	3.93 (1.04)	78.53	High
	3.67	8.72	10.09	46.33	31.19			
I select my research methodology on my own without the help of my supervisor.	21	78	35	57	27	2.96 (1.23)	59.17	Moderate
	9.63	35.78	16.06	26.15	12.39			
I can discuss the results and draw conclusions.	7	18	41	110	42	3.74 (0.97)	74.86	High
	3.21	8.26	18.81	50.46	19.27			
I am able to analyze data.	5	36	51	91	35	3.53 (1.02)	70.55	High
	2.29	16.51	23.39	41.74	16.06			
I can write the research questions and hypotheses.	4	28	47	102	37	3.64 (0.97)	72.84	High
	1.83	12.84	21.56	46.79	16.97			
I am able to write the research abstract.	11	20	36	106	45	3.71 (1.05)	74.13	High
	5.05	9.17	16.51	48.62	20.64			
I am aware of different types of research (quantitative, qualitative, etc.)	10	38	49	88	33	3.44 (1.09)	68.81	High
	4.59	17.43	22.48	40.37	15.14			
Total	66	237	281	655	287	3.56 (1.05)	71.27	High
	4.33	15.53	18.41	42.92	18.81			

Weight average (i.e., mean): 1.0-1.79: V. Low, 1.8-2.59: Low, 2.6-3.39: Moderate, 3.4-4.19: High, and 4.2-5.0: V. High

SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, ND: Not Decided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, Fr: Frequency, SD: Standard Deviation, and RI: Relative Important

6.2 Challenges Connected with Paraphrasing and Plagiarism

In terms of statistics, some of the items presented in table 4 got higher percentages than others and the weighted arithmetic mean values ranged between 2.86 and 3.71 which is considered a high percentage. The data reveals that Kurdish EFL university students are not capable to paraphrase well, and they plagiarize. It is clear from Table 4 that the total weighted arithmetic mean of the *Challenges Connected with Paraphrasing and Plagiarism* dimension reached 3.11, with SD of 1.18, the RI amounted to 62.11% with moderate level. The total arithmetic mean appeared greater than the hypothetical mean which is 3; the data indicates that paraphrasing and plagiarism as two main challenges of writing graduation research projects are approved by the study sample.

In addition, the total percentage of students who responded with SA is 13.07% and A is 31.08%, whereas 23.05% disagree 11.81% strongly disagree and they believe that paraphrasing and plagiarism are not challenges; 20.99% remind not decided. Moreover, as it is seen from the following table, the item of *I know how to paraphrase English texts correctly* has obtained the highest percentage, as the weighted arithmetic mean is 3.71, with the SD of 1.04 and RI of 74.13%. While the item *I plagiarize because I am unable to express my ideas in my own words* has achieved the lowest percentage, with mean 2.86, SD 1.25 and RI 57.15%.

Table 4: Description of Challenges Connected with Paraphrasing and Plagiarism

Items	SD	D	ND	A	SA	Mean (SD)	RI	Level
	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.			
	%	%	%	%	%			
I know how to paraphrase English texts correctly.	6	26	44	92	50	3.71 (1.04)	74.13	High
	2.75	11.93	20.18	42.20	22.94			
I plagiarize because I am unable to express my ideas in my own words.	35	60	46	55	22	2.86 (1.25)	57.16	Moderate
	16.06	27.52	21.10	25.23	10.09			
I plagiarize my work since some instructors do not care about.	27	63	50	66	12	2.88 (1.14)	57.52	Moderate
	12.39	28.90	22.94	30.28	5.50			
I plagiarize because it is quicker (i.e., saves time) and easier to copy something than thinking of something new	35	52	43	58	30	2.98 (1.31)	59.63	Moderate
	16.06	23.85	19.72	26.61	13.76			
Total	103	201	183	271	114	3.11 (1.18)	62.11	Moderate
	11.81	23.05	20.99	31.08	13.07			

Weight Average (i.e., Mean): 1.0-1.79: V. Low, 1.8-2.59: Low, 2.6-3.39: Moderate, 3.4-4.19: High, and 4.2-5.0: V. High.

SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, ND: Not Decided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, Fr: Frequency, SD: Standard Deviation, and RI: Relative Important

6.3 Challenges Relevant to Citation and Referencing

Due to lack of knowledge and carelessness, Kurdish EFL university students face many problems regarding citation and referencing. According to the analysed data, the total weighted arithmetic mean of the items related to citation and referencing challenges reached 3.76, with the SD of 1.04, the RI is 75.11% which achieved high level. Since the total arithmetic mean is greater than the hypothetical mean, the citation and referencing aspect of writing graduation research project can be considered challenges from the point of view of the research sample, As the results reveal, the total percentage of students who believe that they are not well qualified in citation and referencing is 66.51% and those how are against this claim is 14.07% and only 19.42% stay undecided. To be more specific, the item *I use proper citation to avoid plagiarism and strengthen my writing* has obtained the highest percentage since the weighted arithmetic mean is 3.88, SD is 1.01 and RI 77.61%. While the item *I am aware of citation style (e.g., APA, MLA, Harvard, Chicago, etc.)* has achieved the lowest percentage with mean, SD, and RI of 3.59, 1.25 and 71.83% successively. Despite differences in the percentages, their weighted arithmetic mean values ranged from 3.59 to 3.88 which is a good percentage. Thus, the majority of Kurdish senior EFL university students have problems with citation and referencing.

Table 5: Description of Challenges Relevant to Citation & Referencing

Items	SD Fr. %	D Fr. %	ND Fr. %	A Fr. %	SA Fr. %	Mean (SD)	RI	Level
I use proper citation to avoid plagiarism and strengthen my writing.	3 / 1.38	23 / 10.55	37 / 16.97	89 / 40.83	66 / 30.28	3.88 (1.01)	77.61	High
I am able to use in-text citation appropriately	5 / 2.29	17 / 7.80	49 / 22.48	94 / 43.12	53 / 24.31	3.79 (0.97)	75.87	High
I am aware of citation style (e.g., APA, MLA, Harvard, Chicago, etc.)	11 / 5.05	33 / 15.14	41 / 18.81	82 / 37.61	51 / 23.39	3.59 (1.15)	71.83	High
Total	19 / 2.91	73 / 11.16	127 / 19.42	265 / 40.52	170 / 25.99	3.76 (1.04)	75.11	High

Weight average (i.e., mean): 1.0-1.79: V. Low, 1.8-2.59: Low, 2.6-3.39: Moderate, 3.4-4.19: High, and 4.2-5.0: V. High
SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, ND: Not Decided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, Fr: Frequency, SD: Standard Deviation, and RI: Relative Important

6.4 Challenges Relevant to Academic Writing

No one can deny that writing in academic manner is not that easy task for non-native speakers of English. The presented data of Table 6 shows different item percentages, and their weighted arithmetic mean values are between 3.13 and 3.83 which is considered good and high. Moreover, the total weighted arithmetic mean of the academic writing challenges reached 3.42, with standard deviation of 1.14, the relative importance amounted to 68.32% with high level. The total arithmetic

mean is greater than the hypothetical mean. Depending on this, one can state that Kurdish EFL university students face problems in academic writing, In addition, the total percentage of students who responded with SA is 17.04%, A is 39.84%, ND is 17.10%, D is 19.72%, and SD is 6.29%. To be more precise, the item *I have a plan before starting to write and I stick to that plan* has obtained the highest percentage since its weighted arithmetic mean is 3,83 with the SD of 0.99 and RI of 76.70%. Whereas the item *I have difficulty with the spelling of certain words* has got the lowest percentage with mean of 3.13, SD of 1.19, and IR of 62.66%.

Table 6: Description of Challenges Relevant to Academic Writing

Items	SD	D	ND	A	SA	Mean (SD)	RI	Level
	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.			
	%	%	%	%	%			
I have difficulty selecting the appropriate (vocabulary) words to use in the sentences	11	40	35	99	33	3.47 (1.11)	69.45	High
	5.05	18.35	16.06	45.41	15.14			
I have difficulty with the spelling of certain words.	20	59	34	82	23	3.13 (1.19)	62.66	Moderate
	9.17	27.06	15.60	37.61	10.55			
I have a plan before starting to write and I stick to that plan.	4	23	35	99	57	3.83 (0.99)	76.70	High
	1.83	10.55	16.06	45.41	26.15			
I have a problem expressing my ideas through writing.	19	60	34	76	29	3.17 (1.22)	63.30	Moderate
	8.72	27.52	15.60	34.86	13.30			
I find the correct usage of punctuation marks challenging.	5	34	43	98	38	3.60 (1.02)	71.93	High
	2.29	15.60	19.72	44.95	17.43			
I am able to find different resources at the college/university library.	21	39	43	78	37	3.33 (1.23)	66.51	Moderate
	9.63	17.89	19.72	35.78	16.97			
Because of the differences between my L1 and English language, I am having difficulty with grammatical features.	16	46	37	76	43	3.39 (1.22)	67.71	Moderate
	7.34	21.10	16.97	34.86	19.72			
Total	96	301	261	608	260	3.42 (1.14)	68.32	High
	6.29	19.72	17.10	39.84	17.04			

Weight average (i.e., mean): 1.0-1.79 : V. Low, 1.8-2.59: Low, 2.6-3.39: Moderate, 3.4-4.19: High, and 4.2-5.0: V. High

SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, ND: Not Decided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, Fr: Frequency, SD: Standard Deviation, and RI: Relative Important.

6.5 Challenges Relevant to Supervisor

According to table 7, only two items are designed to investigate the supervision problems from the Kurdish EFL university students' perception. The data reveals that the item *I receive feedback from my supervisor; this is a useful strategy to reduce academic writing challenges* has obtained the highest percentage since the weighted arithmetic mean is 3.80, SD is 1.10, and relative important is 76.06%. Meanwhile the second related item to supervision that *I spend at least one hour with my supervisor every week* has achieved the lowest percentage with the mean of 3.32, SD of 1.29, and RI of 66.33%.

Kurdish EFL university students participated in this study prove that they have problems with their supervisors since the total arithmetic mean is greater than the hypothetical mean which is 3.

As it can be seen in the following table, the total weighted arithmetic mean of this challenge has reached 3.56, with standard deviation of 1.20, the relative importance of it is 71.19% which is of high level and importance. Moreover, the participants answer gives different percentages to the options given in the questionnaire. Statistically speaking, 24.08% of the students strongly agree, 38.07% of them agree, 13.76% of them disagree, only 8.26% strongly disagree and 15.83% have not decided yet. The differences in percentage give the weighted arithmetic mean values a range between 3.32 and 3.80 which is high percentage and proves the supervision process from the university perspectives as a challenge.

Table 7: Description of Challenges Relevant to Supervisor

Items	SD	D	ND	A	SA	Mean (SD)	RI	Level
	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.			
	%	%	%	%	%			
I spend at least one hour with my supervisor every week.	24	41	40	68	45	3.32 (1.29)	66.33	Moderate
	11.01	18.81	18.35	31.19	20.64			
I receive feedback from my supervisor; this is a useful strategy to reduce academic writing challenges.	12	19	29	98	60	3.80 (1.10)	76.06	High
	5.50	8.72	13.30	44.95	27.52			
Total	36	60	69	166	105	3.56 (1.20)	71.19	High
	8.26	13.76	15.83	38.07	24.08			
Weight Average (i.e., mean): 1.0-1.79 : V. Low, 1.8-2.59: Low, 2.6-3.39: Moderate, 3.4-4.19: High, and 4.2-5.0: V. High								
SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, ND: Not Decided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, Fr: Frequency, SD: Standard Deviation, and RI: Relative Important								

6.6 Challenges Relevant to Research Methodology Course

Generally speaking, Kurdish EFL university students take a course on methods of research which mainly focuses on how graduation research projects should be written by the students. So, the students are supposed to be able to write good research paper.

This assumption is not proved due to the fact that the total weighted arithmetic mean of this challenge is 3.36, with standard deviation of 1.17, the relative importance amounted to 67.16% with moderate level. Since the total arithmetic mean is greater than the hypothetical mean all items relevant to methods of research course are challenges for the students.

More precisely, as it is seen in table 8, the item *I can take advantage of technology to analyze my study data* has obtained the highest percentage with the weighted arithmetic mean of 4.03, the SD of 1.09 and RI of 80.55%. On the other hand, *I prefer writing my graduation research alone (not in pairs or in group)* has achieved the lowest percentage, with mean, SD, and RI of 2.96, 1.43 and 59.17% successively.

The differences noted in Kurdish EFL university students' perspectives lead to provide the researchers with data of dissimilar percentages. For example, the total percentage of students who responded with SA is 21.56%, A is 35.86%, ND is 16.67%, D is 17.28% and SD is 8.64%. This resulted in ranging weighted arithmetic mean values from 2.96 to 4.03. Thus, one can notice that there are many challenges connected with the research methodology course.

Table 8: Description of Challenges Relevant to Research Methodology Course

Items	SD	D	ND	A	SA	Mean (SD)	RI	Level
	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.	Fr.			
	%	%	%	%	%			
I have experience and knowledge of writing since I have already taken courses on paragraph writing and composition.	15	45	39	85	34	3.36 (1.17)	67.16	Moderate
	6.88	20.64	17.89	38.99	15.60			
I take advantage of the research methodology courses. (i.e., the course of Methods of Research was very helpful and practical)	13	37	48	94	26	3.38 (1.08)	67.61	Moderate
	5.96	16.97	22.02	43.12	11.93			
I had no practice when I took Research Methodology Course. (i.e., the lecturer focused on theory only)	15	45	51	80	27	3.27 (1.13)	65.41	Moderate
	6.88	20.64	23.39	36.70	12.39			
I prefer writing my graduation research alone (not in pairs or in group).	41	60	27	47	43	2.96 (1.43)	59.17	Moderate
	18.81	27.52	12.39	21.56	19.72			
I am interested in writing graduation research project in English.	20	23	29	83	63	3.67 (1.25)	73.39	High
	9.17	10.55	13.30	38.07	28.90			
I can take advantage of technology to analyze my study data.	9	16	24	80	89	4.03 (1.09)	80.55	High
	4.13	7.34	11.01	36.70	40.83			
Total	113	226	218	469	282	3.36 (1.17)	67.16	Moderate
	8.64	17.28	16.67	35.86	21.56			

Weight Average (i.e., mean): 1.0-1.79 : V. Low, 1.8-2.59: Low, 2.6-3.39: Moderate, 3.4-4.19: High, and 4.2-5.0: V. High

SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, ND: Not Decided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, Fr: Frequency, SD: Standard Deviation, and RI: Relative Important

7 Discussion of the Results

The university mission is to allow students to access and contribute to lifelong learning; this can be attained through the process of involving them in designing their own research projects throughout their undergraduate studies. Generally speaking, the students face challenges while designing their graduation research project. Surprisingly, Kurdish EFL students believe that most of them are successful in learning how to design their own research. This can be seen in the result of item no. 2, *I select my research methodology on my own without the help of my supervisor.* The results of other items relevant to research design reveal something different. In other word, research design is a challenge since most students cannot choose their research methodology without the assistance of their supervisor. This could be attributed to lack of knowledge, experience, and research methodology background.

Concerning paraphrasing and plagiarism, it is proved that the majority of Kurdish EFL university students are not able to paraphrase an academic text appropriately, due to poor language skills, thus they plagiarize. The reason behind this is relevant to a number of factors such as its simplicity to cut/paste from the Internet, insufficient knowledge of plagiarism and its academic and administrative consequences, the students' ignorance, the supervisors' carelessness, and lack of paraphrasing and summarizing ability. Moreover, it is the supervisors' duty to familiarize the students with the negative consequence of plagiarism on their academic life. The university instructors, especially those who teach writing skills, composition, academic writing, methods of research, have another duty which refers to plagiarism avoidance and teach proper citation and referencing. The instructors can also encourage students to find their own style of paraphrasing and to avoid plagiarism. In addition, the students should be informed about plagiarism detection tools (i.e., Turnitin software and their applications) which are a good strategy to detect students' plagiarism.

Without a doubt, students have a lot of trouble with practical research and citing and referencing in the early stages of their projects. Thankfully, as the data indicates, most of the students are successful in applying the theoretical information they have learned during their third year of the research methodology course. Moreover, because of the necessity of using citations in their academic writing, most students are aware of the citation styles (e.g., APA, MLA, Harvard, Chicago, etc.). Thus, it is the academic writing instructors' duty to pay much attention to the practical part of their subjects rather than the theoretical one.

The results reveal that most fourth-year students clearly face many challenges in terms of writing their research projects using academic English. Lack of writing practice negatively impacts Kurdish EFL students' writing performance since practice is one of the most useful techniques students can use to improve their writing. Furthermore, the students face common difficulties at the level of their academic writing, particularly in grammar, word choice, spelling, using punctuation marks, expressing ideas and paraphrasing. The problems concerning writing in academic style arise mainly from a lack of practice and experience of writing research projects. The university instructors of writing should work on developing the fresher's academic abilities and teach them different techniques of writing providing them with opportunities to practice; they should provide feedback to

students as an important strategy for effective academic writing. However, an overcrowded classroom may make it difficult for instructors to give feedback.

Concerning the supervision process, one can state that the supervisor has a significant role in the students' research projects. One crucial point is the relationship between the supervisor and their students. Having a postponed meeting and receiving insufficient feedback affects these academic relationships. The supervisors' effective feedback from is another crucial strategy in the students' completion of their research project. As indicated from the result sample, most students believe that feedback is useful for improving their academic writing. Supervisors need to give guidance, advice, and feedback at all stages of writing research projects.

Finally, it is supposed that courses in research methodology make students more qualified, but according to the students' perspectives, the courses are not enough since they are mainly theoretical rather than practical and lack of practice could be related to the large classes and the instructors are not able to supervise everyone and go through all the steps one by one. Perhaps the university instructors teach many courses, thus they are unable to handle the research writing session alongside other subjects.

Conclusions

Based on the results and the discussion, the study has come up with a number of conclusions. Firstly, the majority of students have problems with the research methodology courses in the departments of English at the Colleges of Basic Education- IKR universities. Furthermore, Kurdish EFL university students need to focus on practical rather than theoretical. Secondly, the students are not well qualified in research design and the face challenges regarding citation and referencing. Thirdly, lack of skills, methods, practice, and techniques in academic writing can be considered other main challenges. Most students have problems regarding selecting the appropriate vocabulary, grammatical features, and expressing ideas to use in academic writing. Fourthly, providing the students with appropriate feedback from the supervisor is another challenge; the majority of Kurdish EFL university students believe that receiving feedback from their supervisor is a useful strategy to reduce academic writing challenges. Finally, lack of techniques and knowledge of avoiding plagiarism and paraphrasing are two other main challenges that students suffer from throughout the process of writing their graduation research project.

183

Recommendations

Based on the study conclusion, the current study underlines many significant and practical recommendations that will be future solutions to some problems facing Kurdish EFL university students at the Departments of English- College of Basic Education at the IKR universities.

- The research methodology course requires modification since the course negatively affects the students' research completion. The instructors should pay much attention one the practical part rather than the theoretical one.
- Supervisors should provide helpful feedback to enhance and motivate students to carry out their research.
- Students should attend (online) training workshops and summer vacation (online) courses on research and title development during the summer vacation so that they have enough time to gather information, look for sources on the Internet or in libraries, work on it, read attentively, and write it adequately.
- The instructors should give Kurdish EFL university students different academic writing tasks not only for the final year projects but from the start point of university life so as to eliminate these challenges.
- Group work or research groups are the best ways to make participants feel less stressed and more motivated to do well in research.
- Kurdish EFL instructors can enable students to write critically and creatively through essays and other assignments. These practical activities can enhance the students' academic writing and develop their paraphrasing ability.
- From the first meeting when the freshmen join the university, the instructors should inform students about plagiarism and how it should be avoided. Moreover, the IKR universities should drop out the students who plagiarize most of their works and assignment.

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185

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