

Academic Writing in Higher Education: A PRISMA-Guided Systematic Literature Review of Pedagogical Approaches, Challenges, Genre Practices, and Emerging Trends

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ABSTRACT

Academic writing is a cornerstone of higher education, serving as a medium for knowledge construction, disciplinary communication, and scholarly dissemination. Despite extensive research, existing studies remain fragmented across pedagogical approaches, writing challenges, genre practices, and emerging technological developments. This study addresses this gap through a PRISMA-guided Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that synthesizes contemporary evidence on academic writing in higher education. Guided by four research questions, the review systematically identified, screened, and evaluated studies retrieved from the Scopus and Web of Science databases using the PRISMA framework. Following rigorous screening, eligibility assessment, and quality appraisal, 18 high-quality empirical studies published between 2021 and 2026 were included in the final analysis. The findings were organized into four major themes: (1) academic writing pedagogy, (2) challenges and perceptions, (3) academic writing genres and rhetorical features, and (4) emerging trends and collaborative practices. The review reveals that pedagogical innovation—including discipline-specific writing instruction, curriculum integration, peer-assisted learning, and writing support programmes—remains the dominant research focus. Persistent challenges such as writing anxiety, plagiarism, language proficiency, and academic conventions continue to influence students' writing performance, while genre awareness enhances disciplinary communication. Furthermore, artificial intelligence (AI), collaborative writing, and scholarly writing communities are transforming academic writing practices and expanding opportunities for teaching and learning. Overall, this review demonstrates that academic writing is a multidimensional construct shaped by pedagogical, psychological, rhetorical, and technological factors. The study contributes a comprehensive synthesis of current scholarship and offers evidence-based implications for educators, researchers, policymakers, and higher education institutions seeking to strengthen academic writing instruction and inform future research directions.

Keywords: Academic Writing; Higher Education; Systematic Literature Review; PRISMA; Writing Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a fundamental component of higher education because it enables students and academics to communicate knowledge, demonstrate critical thinking, and contribute to scholarly discourse. Beyond fulfilling assessment requirements, academic writing supports disciplinary learning, research dissemination, and professional development across diverse fields of study. As higher education becomes increasingly globalised and technology-driven, expectations for academic writing have expanded to include discipline-specific literacy, rhetorical competence, ethical writing practices, and digital literacy. Recent studies have highlighted the

effectiveness of pedagogical strategies such as curriculum-integrated writing instruction, discipline-specific writing support, peer-assisted learning, and writing centres in strengthening students' writing competence. At the same time, technological developments, including artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted writing tools and collaborative online writing environments, are reshaping how academic writing is taught and practiced in universities. These developments underscore the need to understand academic writing as a multidimensional construct influenced by pedagogical, psychological, rhetorical, and technological factors. Consequently, this study adopts a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review (SLR) to provide a comprehensive synthesis of recent evidence on academic writing in higher education by examining four key dimensions: pedagogical approaches, challenges and perceptions, genre practices, and emerging trends.

Despite the growing body of research on academic writing, the literature remains fragmented, with most studies focusing on isolated aspects such as writing pedagogy, writing anxiety, plagiarism, genre analysis, or AI-assisted writing rather than providing an integrated perspective. Existing reviews have rarely synthesised these interconnected dimensions within a single conceptual framework, making it difficult for educators and researchers to identify overarching patterns, effective instructional practices, and emerging directions in the field. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital learning environments and collaborative writing practices has created new opportunities and challenges that have yet to be comprehensively examined through a rigorous PRISMA-guided review. Addressing this research gap, the present study systematically analyses recent empirical studies to identify dominant pedagogical approaches, challenges influencing academic writing, genre and rhetorical practices, and emerging technological and collaborative innovations. By integrating these themes, the review offers a holistic understanding of academic writing in higher education and provides evidence-based insights to inform future research, policy development, and instructional practice.

Research questions are important to a systematic literature review (SLR). The questions provide the foundation and direction for the entire review process. A well-defined research question ensures that the literature search is exhaustive and systematic, covering all relevant studies that address key aspects of the topic (Kitchenham, 2007). The research questions in this SLR are formulated based on the PICO framework. This framework is a mnemonic style used to formulate research questions, particularly in qualitative research, proposed by Lockwood et al. (2015). PICO stands for Population, Interest, and Context. This SLR is done to answer the four research questions below;

RQ1 What pedagogical approaches have been employed to enhance academic writing in higher education?

RQ2 What challenges and perceptions influence academic writing practices among students and educators in higher education?

RQ3 What are the dominant academic writing genres and rhetorical features reported in the literature, and how do they support academic communication?

RQ4 What emerging trends and collaborative practices have been adopted to improve academic writing in higher education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Constructivist learning theory by Vygotsky (1978) that supports Academic Writing Pedagogy

Constructivist Learning Theory, proposed by Vygotsky (1978), provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding academic writing pedagogy in higher education. The theory posits that learning is a socially mediated process in which knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with others rather than passively received. Central to Vygotsky's theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that learners achieve higher levels of understanding when guided by more knowledgeable individuals, such as instructors or peers. This guidance, commonly referred to as scaffolding, enables learners to gradually develop independent competence. In the context of academic writing pedagogy, constructivist

learning emphasizes collaborative learning activities, peer review, instructor feedback, writing workshops, and mentoring as essential strategies for developing writing proficiency. Students improve their academic writing by engaging in meaningful dialogue, reflecting on feedback, and revising their work through iterative learning processes. The studies reviewed in this SLR demonstrate the application of constructivist principles through discipline-specific writing instruction, writing centres, peer-led writing cafés, and collaborative writing support initiatives. These pedagogical approaches foster active learning, critical thinking, and knowledge construction, enabling learners to develop the disciplinary writing skills required for academic success. Consequently, Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory provides a robust framework for explaining how interactive and scaffolded instructional practices contribute to the effective teaching and learning of academic writing in higher education.

Self-efficacy theory by Bandura (1997) that supports Challenges and Perceptions

Self-Efficacy Theory, proposed by Bandura (1997), provides a valuable theoretical foundation for understanding the challenges and perceptions associated with academic writing in higher education. The theory defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific performance outcomes. According to Bandura, students with high writing self-efficacy are more likely to approach writing tasks with confidence, persistence, and resilience, whereas those with low self-efficacy often experience anxiety, self-doubt, and avoidance of challenging writing activities. These beliefs are shaped by four principal sources: mastery experiences, vicarious learning through observing others, verbal encouragement, and emotional or physiological states. In the context of academic writing, self-efficacy influences students' willingness to engage in complex writing tasks, revise drafts based on feedback, and overcome writing difficulties. This theory is particularly relevant to studies investigating writing apprehension, language barriers, plagiarism awareness, and perceptions of academic writing among students and educators. It also explains why supportive learning environments, constructive feedback, peer collaboration, and successful writing experiences can enhance learners' confidence and improve writing performance. Therefore, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory provides a robust framework for interpreting how learners' beliefs about their writing abilities shape their perceptions, motivation, and overall success in academic writing within higher education.

Genre Theory by (Swales, 1990) that supports Academic Writing Genres and Rhetorical Features

Self-Efficacy Theory, proposed by Bandura (1997), provides a valuable theoretical foundation for understanding the challenges and perceptions associated with academic writing in higher education. The theory defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific performance outcomes. According to Bandura, students with high writing self-efficacy are more likely to approach writing tasks with confidence, persistence, and resilience, whereas those with low self-efficacy often experience anxiety, self-doubt, and avoidance of challenging writing activities. These beliefs are shaped by four principal sources: mastery experiences, vicarious learning through observing others, verbal encouragement, and emotional or physiological states. In the context of academic writing, self-efficacy influences students' willingness to engage in complex writing tasks, revise drafts based on feedback, and overcome writing difficulties. This theory is particularly relevant to studies investigating writing apprehension, language barriers, plagiarism awareness, and perceptions of academic writing among students and educators. It also explains why supportive learning environments, constructive feedback, peer collaboration, and successful writing experiences can enhance learners' confidence and improve writing performance. Therefore, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory provides a robust framework for interpreting how learners' beliefs about their writing abilities shape their perceptions, motivation, and overall success in academic writing within higher education.

Community of Practice (CoP) by Lave & Wenger (1991) that supports Emerging Trends and Collaborative Practices

Communities of Practice (CoP), introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991), provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding emerging trends and collaborative practices in academic writing. The theory conceptualizes learning as a social process that occurs through active participation in a community where individuals share knowledge, experiences, and common goals. Rather than viewing learning as an individual activity, CoP emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through interaction, collaboration, and engagement with more

experienced members of a community. Central to this theory is the concept of **legitimate peripheral participation**, whereby novices gradually develop expertise by observing, participating in, and contributing to authentic community practices. In the context of academic writing, Communities of Practice explain how collaborative writing groups, peer mentoring, writing cafés, research teams, and AI-supported learning communities facilitate the development of writing competence and scholarly identity. These collaborative environments encourage writers to exchange feedback, negotiate ideas, refine writing strategies, and learn disciplinary conventions through continuous interaction. The theory is particularly relevant to emerging practices such as scholarly writing groups, collaborative writing initiatives, and technology-enabled writing communities, where learning extends beyond traditional classroom instruction. Consequently, Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice theory provides a robust framework for explaining how collaborative engagement and shared learning experiences foster academic writing development, enhance research productivity, and promote professional growth within higher education.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

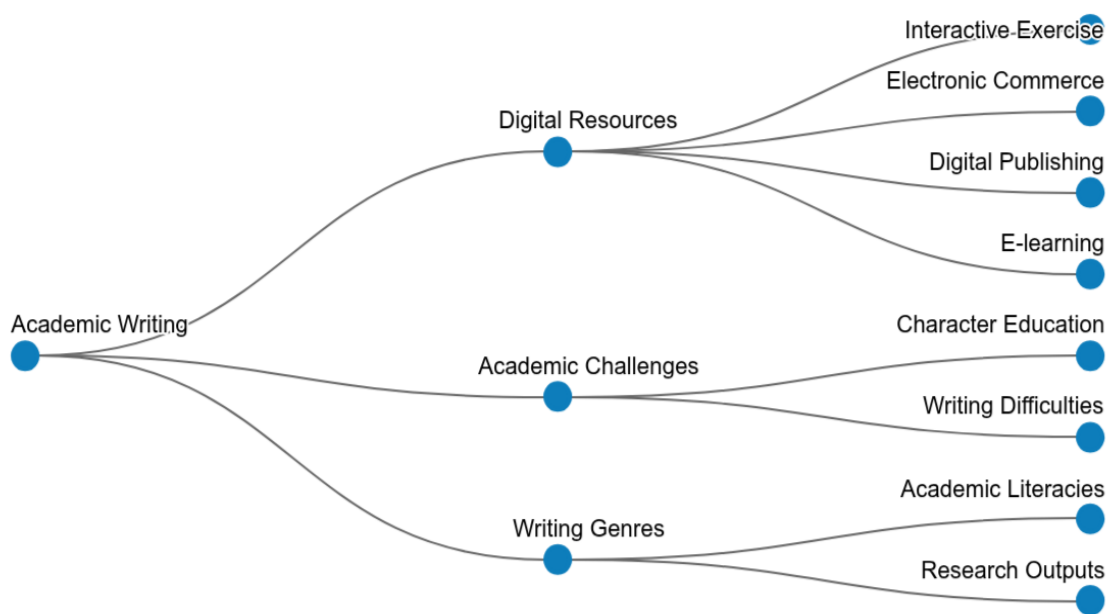


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework underpinning this systematic literature review on Academic Writing in Higher Education, illustrating how the current body of literature converges around four interconnected dimensions: academic writing pedagogy, challenges and perceptions, academic writing genres and rhetorical features, and emerging trends and collaborative practices. The framework positions academic writing as the central construct that shapes teaching, learning, and scholarly communication in higher education. As shown in the figure, academic writing is influenced by pedagogical practices, learner-related challenges, genre-specific conventions, and evolving digital and collaborative environments. These dimensions are interrelated rather than independent, collectively contributing to the development of students' academic literacy and writing competence. The framework is anchored in four complementary theories that explain how academic writing is taught, experienced, structured, and continuously transformed within higher education.

The first dimension, academic writing pedagogy, is grounded in Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which views learning as a socially mediated process where knowledge is constructed through interaction, collaboration, and guided practice. Within academic writing, this perspective supports pedagogical approaches such as discipline-specific writing instruction, curriculum integration, peer-assisted learning, writing centres, and scaffolded feedback. These instructional practices enable learners to progressively develop writing competence through engagement with instructors and peers within authentic academic contexts. The second dimension, **challenges and perceptions**, is supported by **Self-Efficacy Theory** (Bandura, 1997), which emphasizes that learners' beliefs about their writing capabilities influence their motivation, persistence, and

performance. Students with higher writing self-efficacy are more likely to overcome writing difficulties, respond positively to feedback, and engage confidently in academic writing tasks, whereas lower self-efficacy often manifests as writing anxiety, apprehension, and reduced academic performance. This theoretical lens explains how individual perceptions, confidence, and institutional support shape students' writing experiences.

The third dimension, academic writing genres and rhetorical features, is underpinned by **Genre Theory** (Swales, 1990), which conceptualizes academic writing as a collection of socially recognized genres that serve specific communicative purposes within disciplinary communities. Genre Theory explains how writers learn to organize ideas, employ rhetorical moves, and conform to disciplinary conventions in genres such as research articles, teaching philosophy statements, and diversity, equity, and inclusion statements. Understanding these rhetorical structures enables students and researchers to communicate effectively within their academic disciplines. Finally, the dimension of emerging trends and collaborative practices is **anchored in** Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which conceptualizes learning as participation in communities where knowledge is created and shared through collaboration. This perspective explains the growing importance of scholarly writing groups, peer mentoring, collaborative writing, digital learning environments, and AI-assisted writing tools in higher education. As illustrated in the framework, these emerging practices are closely associated with the increasing use of digital resources—including e-learning, digital publishing, interactive learning technologies, and electronic platforms—which facilitate collaborative knowledge construction and professional development. Collectively, the four theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive conceptual foundation for synthesizing the literature on academic writing in higher education and support the thematic organization of this PRISMA-guided systematic literature review.

METHODOLOGY

For conducting systematic literature reviews, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) approach is a widely accepted standard that guarantees transparency, completeness, and consistency throughout the procedure by Page et al. (2021). guide how to systematically identify, screen, and include studies in their review. In the context of this SLR, the writers involved in this article act as researchers and work together to analyse the articles deemed relevant for the title. Two important databases, Web of Science and Scopus, were used in this analysis because of their wide coverage and robustness.

The PRISMA approach is organized into four key stages: (i) identification, (ii) screening, (iii) eligibility, and (iv) data abstraction. In the identification phase, databases are searched to locate all relevant studies. The screening phase then involves evaluating these studies against predefined criteria to eliminate irrelevant or low-quality research. During the eligibility phase, the remaining studies are thoroughly assessed to confirm they meet the inclusion criteria. Finally, data abstraction focuses on extracting and synthesizing data from the included studies, which is essential for deriving meaningful and reliable conclusions. This structured method ensures that the systematic review is conducted with rigor, leading to trustworthy results that can guide future research and practice. The PRISMA framework lists three main stages for analysis: (i) identification, (ii) screening, (iii) eligibility, (iv) data abstraction and analysis, as well as (v) quality of appraisal.

In accordance with the PRISMA framework, the identification phase represents a critical starting point in the systematic literature review process, as it is designed to ensure exhaustive coverage of relevant studies while reducing the risk of selection bias. In this study, a structured and comprehensive search was conducted across two leading bibliographic databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), using the keywords “academic writing,” and “higher education.” Table 1 below shows the search string.

These databases were deliberately selected because of their extensive multidisciplinary coverage, stringent indexing criteria, and strong representation of high-quality, peer-reviewed journals. The search process resulted in the retrieval of 141 records from Scopus and 100 records from Web of Science, yielding a combined total of 241 records prior to the removal of duplicates.

The higher number of results obtained from Scopus can be attributed to its broader inclusion of journals and stronger coverage in the social sciences, whereas WoS contributed a more targeted collection of highly cited and methodologically rigorous studies. As shown in Table 1, the identification of 241 records reflects the growing

academic interest in academic writing within higher education and highlights the conceptual diversity of research spanning linguistic, pedagogical, and psychological perspectives. Employing multiple databases enhances the methodological robustness of the review by minimizing database-specific bias and increasing the likelihood of capturing diverse research traditions and geographical contexts.

Additionally, the use of carefully designed search terms ensured sensitivity to terminological variation while maintaining alignment with the review's objectives. Overall, this transparent and systematic identification process establishes a strong foundation for subsequent screening and eligibility stages, consistent with PRISMA standards and expectations for rigorous, replicable research

Table 1 The search string.

Scopus	\TITLE-ABS-KEY (("academic writing" OR "academic composition" OR "scholarly writing") AND (academicians OR "academic staff" OR "faculty members" OR "university professors" OR "higher education professionals") AND (university OR "higher education" OR "tertiary education" OR "college"))
Web of Science	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("academic writing" OR "academic composition" OR "scholarly writing") AND (academicians OR "academic staff" OR "faculty members" OR "university professors" OR "higher education professionals") AND (university OR "higher education" OR "tertiary education" OR "college")) Extracted July 2026

During the screening stage of the systematic literature review, potentially relevant studies were evaluated to ensure their alignment with the four established research questions. This phase focused on refining the initial pool of records by removing duplicates and applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following the initial review, 185 publications were excluded for failing to meet the scope and relevance requirements of the study, leaving 56 (Scopus=34; Wos; 22) articles for further consideration, as outlined in Figure 2. The primary inclusion criterion was the type of literature, with priority given to scholarly sources that offer substantive and empirical insights. As a result, materials such as book reviews, book series, meta-syntheses, meta-analyses, conference proceedings, and book chapters not directly related to the core focus of the review were excluded. To ensure consistency and relevance to contemporary academic discourse, only peer-reviewed publications written in English and published between 2012 and 2026 were retained. Additionally, a duplication check led to the removal of 0 repeated records across the databases. This systematic and criteria-driven screening process enhanced the focus and quality of the evidence base, ensuring that only the most relevant and methodologically sound studies progressed to the subsequent stages of analysis.

For the third step, known as eligibility, a total of 56 articles have been prepared. All articles' titles and key content were thoroughly reviewed at this stage to ensure that the inclusion requirements were fulfilled and fit into the present study with the current research aims. Therefore, two reports were omitted because they were not pure science articles based on empirical evidence. Finally, 17 articles are available for review (see Table 3).

Table 2 The selection criterion is searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2012 – 2026	< 2012
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject Area	Academic Writing	Besides Academic Writing

An integrative analysis was used as one of the assessment strategies in this study to examine and synthesize a variety of research designs (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods). To develop themes, the authors carefully analyzed 17 publications for relevant material related to the study's topics. They examined the methodology and research results of significant studies on academic writing and higher education. The authors

collaborated to develop themes based on the evidence presented throughout the study. They kept a log of their data analysis process to document relevant perspectives, analyses, or ideas. The authors ensured consistency in theme design by comparing the results and discussing disagreements between themselves. This expert review phase established the validity of each subtheme by ensuring clarity, importance, and suitability (Refer to Appendix 1).

According to Kitchenham and Charters (Kitchenham, 2007), the researchers need to assess the quality of the research chosen. The next stage is applying quality assessment suggested by Abouzahra et al., (2020), which consist of six questions complying to a scoring procedure for evaluating each criteria. The possible ratings are

"Yes" (Y) with a score of 1 if the criterion is fully met, "Partly" (P) with a score of 0.5 if the criterion is somewhat met but contains some gaps or shortcomings, and "No" (N) with a score of 0 if the criterion is not met at all.

Table 3 Possible ratings for 6 question by Abouzahra et al. (2020)

No	Question
QA1	Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?
QA2	Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?
QA3	Is the study methodology clearly established?
QA4	Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?
QA5	Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?
QA6	Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

Each writer independently assesses the study according to these criteria, and the scores are then totalled across all experts to determine the overall mark. For a study to be accepted for the next process, the total mark, derived from summing the scores from all three experts, must exceed 3.0. This threshold ensures that only studies meeting a certain quality standard proceed further. The results are shown in Table 4.

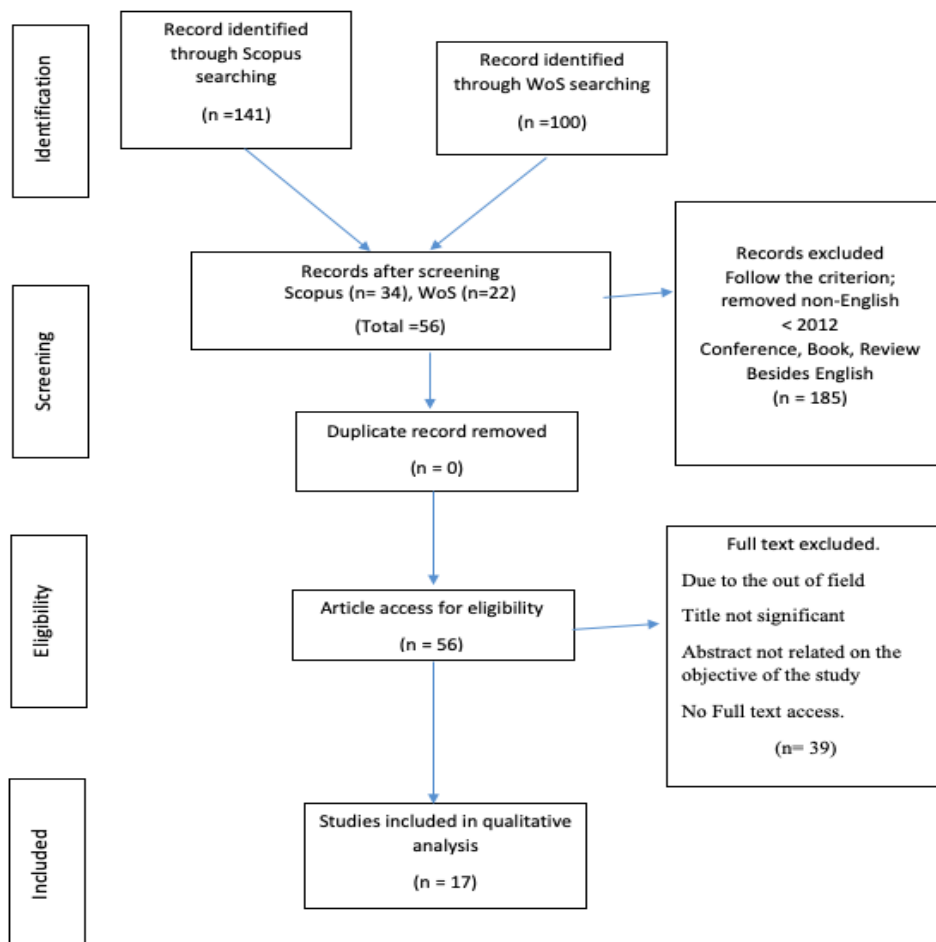


Figure 2 Flow diagram of the proposed searching study (Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, 2009)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quality of Assessment

Table 4 shows the result of the assessment performance for selected primary studies. The overall quality of the articles is as follows;

- **High quality (≥80%):** Majority of studies
- **Moderate quality (60–79%):** Conceptual or descriptive studies
- **Lower quality (<60%):** Primarily survey-only or exploratory abstracts

Table 4 Quality of Assessment for the selected 17 documents

Study	Author(s) & Year	Article Title	QA 1	QA 2	QA 3	QA 4	QA 5	QA 6	Total Mark	Percentage (%)
PS1	Wang (2023)	Demystifying Academic Promotional Genre: A Rhetorical Move-Step Analysis of Teaching Philosophy Statements (TPSs)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS2	Odetallah (2025)	Paving the Way for Legal Academic Writing in Higher Education Institutions	Y	Y	Y	P	N	P	4.0	66.7
PS3	Wang (2024)	Unpacking the Rhetoric of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statements for Academic Job Application Purposes	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS4	Auten et al. (2016)	Educating Faculty Members on the Importance of Requiring High-Quality Information Resources at a Community College	Y	Y	P	P	N	N	3.0	50.0
PS5	Valerdi Zarate (2025)	Evaluative Language in Undergraduate Academic Writing	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS6	Hasan et al. (2025)	Factors Influencing Bangladeshi English Teachers Perceptions of Plagiarism	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS7	Mahmud & Rahman (2023)	Academic Writing of Saudi Graduate Students: Issues and Improvements	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS9	Webb et al. (2023)	Reflections on a Peer-Led Writing Cafe	Y	Y	P	P	N	P	4.0	66.7
PS10	Thomas et al. (2022)	Constructing an Academic Skills Toolkit for Embedding Academic Practices	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS11	Olsson & Sheridan (2012)	A Case Study of Swedish Scholars Experiences with English in Academic Publishing	Y	Y	Y	P	P	N	4.0	66.7
PS12	Mathew & Sankara Narayanan (2023)	Implementing Discipline-Specific Writing Support for Undergraduate Students	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS13	Forero-Gomez et al. (2025)	Exploring the Role of Writing in the Mechanical Engineering Curriculum	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS14	Dillon et al. (2024)	The Use of Large Language Model Tools Such as ChatGPT in Academic Writing	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS15	Forero-Gomez et al. (2024)	Writing from Within: How Learning to Write Occurs in a Communication Studies Curriculum	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS16	Alfehaid & Alkhatib (2024)	(Non)-Conformity to Native English Norms in Postgraduate Students Writing	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS17	Samarawickrema et al. (2026)	How Do We Support the Scholarship of Education-Focused Academics	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3
PS18	Abad & Salazar (2024)	Collaborative Writing in Higher Education and Its Contribution to the Training of Teacher Researchers	Y	Y	Y	P	Y	P	5.0	83.3

The table (Table 4) categorizes the selected studies into four major themes, providing a structured overview of the current research landscape on academic writing in higher education. The largest group, Academic Writing Pedagogy, comprises seven studies that emphasize curriculum development, discipline-specific writing

instruction, faculty development, peer-assisted learning, and institutional support mechanisms aimed at enhancing students' academic writing skills. This finding suggests that pedagogical innovation remains the primary focus of contemporary research. The second theme, Challenges and Perceptions, includes six studies that investigate factors affecting academic writing, such as writing anxiety, plagiarism, language proficiency, academic conventions, and learners' perceptions of writing competence. These studies highlight the complex cognitive, linguistic, and institutional barriers faced by students and educators. The third theme, Academic Writing Genres and Rhetorical Features, contains two studies that examine the rhetorical organization and genre conventions of academic documents, demonstrating the importance of genre awareness in effective scholarly communication. Finally, Emerging Trends and Collaborative Practices consists of three studies exploring recent developments, including the integration of artificial intelligence, collaborative writing, and scholarly writing communities. Collectively, the thematic distribution indicates that while pedagogical approaches dominate the literature, increasing attention is being directed toward technological innovations and collaborative learning practices, reflecting the evolving nature of academic writing in higher education.

Themes Table 5 Analysis for Themes

Theme	Number of Studies
Theme 1. Academic Writing Pedagogy	7
Theme 2. Challenges, and Perceptions	6
Theme 3. Academic Writing Genres and Rhetorical Features	2
Theme 4. Emerging Trends and Collaborative Practices	3
Total	18

The thematic distribution of the 18 selected studies reveals the predominant research priorities in academic writing within higher education. As shown in the table, Theme 1: Academic Writing Pedagogy contains the highest number of studies ($n = 7$), indicating that the literature has primarily focused on pedagogical approaches designed to enhance students' academic writing skills. These studies emphasize curriculum development, discipline-specific writing instruction, writing support programmes, and faculty-led interventions, reflecting the importance of effective teaching practices in improving academic writing competence. The second largest category, Theme 2: Challenges and Perceptions ($n = 6$), highlights the various factors influencing academic writing, including writing anxiety, plagiarism, language proficiency, and learners' and educators' perceptions of writing. This suggests a strong research interest in understanding the barriers that affect writing performance and academic success. In contrast, Theme 3: Academic Writing Genres and Rhetorical Features comprises only two studies, indicating comparatively limited research on genre analysis and rhetorical structures despite their significance in academic communication. Finally, Theme 4: Emerging Trends and Collaborative Practices includes three studies focusing on innovations such as AI-assisted writing, collaborative writing groups, and scholarly communities. Overall, the distribution demonstrates that while pedagogical approaches remain the dominant area of investigation, recent scholarship is increasingly recognizing the importance of technological innovations, collaboration, and evolving writing practices in higher education.

Theme 1 (T1): Academic Writing Pedagogy and Curriculum Development

Table 6 Theme 1

PS	Author (Year)	Article Title	Research Focus
PS2	Odetallah (2025)	Paving the Way for Legal Academic Writing in Higher Education Institutions	Curriculum design for legal academic writing
PS4	Auten et al. (2016)	Educating Faculty Members on the Importance of Requiring High-Quality Information Resources at a Community College	Faculty development and information literacy
PS9	Webb et al. (2023)	Reflections on a Peer-Led Writing Café	Peer-assisted academic writing support
PS10	Thomas et al. (2022)	Constructing an Academic Skills Toolkit for Embedding Academic Practices	Academic skills toolkit development
PS12	Mathew & Sankara	Implementing Discipline-Specific Writing Support for Undergraduate Students in the Omani Context	Discipline-specific writing instruction

	Narayanan (2023)		
PS13	Forero-Gómez et al. (2025)	Exploring the Role of Writing in the Mechanical Engineering Curriculum: An Integrative Approach	Integration of writing into engineering curriculum
PS15	Forero-Gómez et al. (2024)	Writing from Within: How Learning to Write Occurs in a Communication Studies Curriculum	Writing instruction within disciplinary curriculum

Theme 1, Academic Writing Pedagogy, highlights the importance of instructional approaches and curriculum innovations in enhancing students' academic writing skills across higher education disciplines. The studies consistently emphasize that effective academic writing development extends beyond teaching language mechanics to embedding writing instruction within disciplinary contexts. For example, Odetallah (2025) proposed a specialized legal writing curriculum tailored to law students, while Mathew and Sankara Narayanan (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of discipline-specific writing support through genre-based pedagogy integrated into undergraduate programmes. Similarly, Forero-Gómez et al. (2024, 2025) emphasized embedding writing instruction within Communication Studies and Mechanical Engineering curricula to strengthen students' disciplinary literacy and professional competencies. Complementing these curriculum-based initiatives, Thomas et al. (2022) developed an academic skills toolkit to integrate writing practices across teaching and learning activities, whereas Webb et al. (2023) showed that peer-led writing cafés foster collaboration, confidence, and a sense of academic belonging among students. In addition, Auten et al. (2016) highlighted the role of faculty development in promoting information literacy and encouraging the use of high-quality academic resources. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that academic writing pedagogy is most effective when it combines structured curriculum design, discipline-specific instruction, collaborative learning, and institutional support to cultivate students' academic writing competence.

Theme 2 (T2): Challenges, Perceptions, and Factors Influencing Academic Writing

Table 7 - Theme 2

PS	Author (Year)	Article Title	Research Focus
PS5	Valerdi Zárate (2025)	Evaluative Language in Undergraduate Academic Writing: Expressions of Attitude as Sources of Text Effectiveness in English as a Foreign Language	Evaluative language and writing effectiveness
PS6	Hasan et al. (2025)	Factors Influencing Bangladeshi English Teachers' Perceptions of Academic Policy, Academic Culture and Knowledge Related to Plagiarism in Higher Education	Plagiarism awareness and academic integrity
PS7	Mahmud & Rahman (2023)	Academic Writing of Saudi Graduate Students: Issues and Improvements	Graduate students' writing challenges
PS11	Olsson & Sheridan (2012)	A Case Study of Swedish Scholars' Experiences with and Perceptions of the Use of English in Academic Publishing	Language challenges in academic publishing
PS16	Alfehaid & Alkhatib (2024)	(Non)-Conformity to Native English Norms in Postgraduate Students' Writing in UK Universities	Native-speaker norms and postgraduate writing

The studies categorized under Theme 2: Challenges and Perceptions examine the diverse factors that influence academic writing performance and experiences among students and educators in higher education. Collectively, the six studies highlight that academic writing is affected by linguistic, cognitive, institutional, and psychological challenges. Valerdi Zárate (2025) investigated the role of evaluative language in improving the effectiveness of undergraduate academic writing, emphasizing the importance of appropriate linguistic expression. Hasan et al. (2025) explored English teachers' perceptions of plagiarism and academic integrity, revealing that institutional policies, insufficient writing instruction, and the emergence of AI technologies significantly influence ethical writing practices. Mahmud and Rahman (2023) identified language difficulties, argument development, and research writing as major obstacles faced by Saudi graduate students. Similarly, Olsson and Sheridan (2012) examined the challenges encountered by Swedish scholars when publishing in English, particularly the difficulties associated with disciplinary discourse and language proficiency. Finally, Alfehaid and Alkhatib (2024) investigated postgraduate students' experiences with native English norms, demonstrating that effective academic writing depends more on clarity and comprehensibility than strict adherence to native-speaker conventions. Overall, these studies indicate that successful academic writing requires not only linguistic

competence but also confidence, institutional support, and an inclusive academic environment that addresses learners' diverse needs.

Theme 3 (T3): Academic Writing Genres and Rhetorical Features

Table 8 - Theme 3

PS	Author (Year)	Article Title	Research Focus
PS1	Wang (2023)	Demystifying Academic Promotional Genre: A Rhetorical Move-Step Analysis of Teaching Philosophy Statements (TPSs)	Rhetorical structure of teaching philosophy statements
PS3	Wang (2024)	Unpacking the Rhetoric of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statements for Academic Job Application Purposes	Rhetorical analysis of DEI statements

The studies grouped under Theme 3: Academic Writing Genres and Rhetorical Features focus on understanding the rhetorical organization and communicative purposes of specialized academic genres in higher education. Both studies, conducted by Wang (2023, 2024), employ genre analysis to examine how academic documents are structured and how writers strategically organize content to meet disciplinary and institutional expectations. Wang (2023) investigates the rhetorical move-step structure of Teaching Philosophy Statements (TPSs), identifying the common rhetorical moves and sequencing patterns that successful faculty members use to present their teaching identities and professional competencies. The findings provide valuable insights for novice academics seeking to prepare effective teaching philosophy statements for academic promotion and teaching award applications. Similarly, Wang (2024) analyzes the rhetorical features of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statements submitted for academic job applications, revealing the rhetorical moves and organizational patterns that characterize this increasingly important promotional genre. The study also explores stakeholders' perceptions of these rhetorical features and their implications for academic writing instruction. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that effective academic writing extends beyond language accuracy to include mastery of genre conventions and rhetorical structures that fulfill specific communicative purposes. Their findings highlight the importance of genre awareness in supporting academic communication, professional identity development, and success in academic and career advancement within higher education.

Theme 4: Emerging Trends and Collaborative Practices in Academic Writing

Table 9 Theme 4

PS	Author (Year)	Article Title	Research Focus
PS14	Dillon et al. (2024)	The Use of Large Language Model Tools Such as ChatGPT in Academic Writing in English Medium Education Postgraduate Programs: A Grounded Theory Approach	AI (ChatGPT/LLMs) in academic writing
PS17	Samarawickrema et al. (2026)	How Do We Support the Scholarship of Education-Focused Academics in Research-Intensive Universities? A Scholarly Writing Group Model	Scholarly writing groups and academic development
PS18	Abad & Salazar (2024)	Collaborative Writing in Higher Education and Its Contribution to the Training of Teacher Researchers	Collaborative writing and teacher education

The studies classified under Theme 4: Emerging Trends and Collaborative Practices illustrate how academic writing in higher education is evolving through technological innovation and collaborative learning approaches. Collectively, these studies highlight a shift from traditional, individual writing practices toward more interactive, technology-enhanced, and community-oriented models of academic writing. Dillon et al. (2024) examined the use of large language model (LLM) tools, such as ChatGPT, in postgraduate academic writing, emphasizing both the opportunities and ethical challenges associated with AI-assisted writing. The study suggests that while AI can support writing development and improve accessibility, its use requires careful consideration of academic integrity and assessment practices. Complementing this technological perspective, Samarawickrema et al. (2026) explored the effectiveness of scholarly writing groups in fostering research productivity, professional identity, and peer support among education-focused academics in research-intensive universities. Similarly, Abad and Salazar (2024) investigated collaborative writing as a means of developing teacher researchers' academic and

professional competencies, highlighting the value of shared knowledge construction and collaborative learning. Together, these studies demonstrate that emerging trends in academic writing extend beyond individual skill development to encompass AI-enabled learning, scholarly collaboration, and peer-supported writing communities. These innovations are reshaping academic writing practices by promoting continuous learning, knowledge sharing, and professional development within higher education institutions.

This PRISMA-guided systematic literature review synthesized evidence from 18 high-quality studies to examine the current state of academic writing in higher education through four interconnected themes: academic writing pedagogy, challenges and perceptions, academic writing genres and rhetorical features, **and** emerging trends and collaborative practices. The findings indicate that academic writing pedagogy represents the most extensively researched area, with studies emphasizing curriculum integration, discipline-specific writing instruction, peer-assisted learning, writing centres, and faculty development as effective strategies for improving students' writing competence. Studies by Odetallah (2025), Thomas et al. (2022), Mathew and Sankara Narayanan (2023), Forero-Gómez et al. (2024, 2025), and Webb et al. (2023) collectively demonstrate that embedding writing instruction within disciplinary contexts promotes academic literacy and critical thinking. The review also highlights persistent challenges and perceptions affecting academic writing, including writing anxiety, plagiarism awareness, language barriers, and conformity to native English norms, as reported by Mahmud and Rahman (2023), Nurkamto et al. (2024), Hasan et al. (2025), and Alfehaid and Alkhatib (2024). Furthermore, the findings reveal that effective academic writing depends on understanding disciplinary genres and rhetorical conventions, as illustrated by Wang (2023, 2024), while emerging studies by Dillon et al. (2024), Samarawickrema et al. (2026), and Abad and Salazar (2024) demonstrate the growing influence of artificial intelligence, collaborative writing, and scholarly writing communities in reshaping academic writing practices. Overall, the review confirms that academic writing is a multidimensional process influenced by pedagogical, psychological, rhetorical, and technological factors, consistent with the four theoretical perspectives underpinning this review.

The findings have important implications for higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators seeking to strengthen academic writing instruction. Universities should adopt discipline-specific and scaffolded pedagogical approaches grounded in constructivist learning principles while fostering learners' writing self-efficacy through constructive feedback, peer learning, and supportive academic environments. Institutions should also integrate explicit instruction on genre conventions and rhetorical strategies to prepare students for diverse forms of scholarly communication. At the same time, the increasing adoption of digital technologies, including AI-assisted writing tools, requires the development of clear institutional policies that balance technological innovation with academic integrity and ethical writing practices. Future research should expand beyond descriptive studies by employing longitudinal, mixed-methods, and cross-cultural designs to investigate the long-term impact of pedagogical interventions, collaborative writing initiatives, and AI-supported writing on students' academic performance and research productivity. Additional studies are also needed to explore discipline-specific writing practices across diverse educational contexts, examine educators' readiness to integrate emerging technologies, and evaluate how digital collaboration can further enhance academic writing competence. Such investigations will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of academic writing and support the development of evidence-based policies and instructional practices that respond to the evolving demands of higher education.

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