

A Systematic Review of Effective Techniques for Overcoming Difficulties in Academic Writing

Nurjadi¹, ilham^{2*}, Irwandi³

¹English Language Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

Email address: nurjadinurjadi2@gmail.com

²English Language Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

Email address: ilham.ummatarem@gmail.com

³English Language Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

Email address: irwandi@ummat.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges students face in academic writing and identifies effective techniques that can help overcome these problems. The research background shows that academic writing skills are essential for students and researchers, but many face difficulties in organising ideas, following writing guidelines, and structuring arguments logically. Using a qualitative approach, this study applied systematic literature review (SLR) to collect data from in-depth interviews and observations of students and researchers. The results showed that good planning, clear language use, and peer feedback significantly improved the quality of writing. In addition, techniques such as mind mapping and the use of writing aids were also shown to support a more systematic writing process. This study fills a gap in the literature by highlighting the lack of integration of various academic writing techniques and the influence of external factors such as social support and stress levels on the effectiveness of these techniques. The findings are expected to provide guidance for academic writers in selecting techniques appropriate to the challenges faced and provide insights for educators in supporting the development of students' writing skills.

***Corresponding Author:**

Ilham

Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram

Email: ilham.ummatarem@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a fundamental skill required by students, researchers, and professionals to effectively communicate knowledge in academic contexts (Ilham et al., 2025; Ilham, 2022, 2024). These skills play an important role not only in

completing coursework, but also in producing scholarly works and publications that contribute to the development of science (Anto et al., 2024). Despite the importance of these skills, many students experience significant difficulties in mastering academic writing. A study conducted by Aizawa et al. (2023) revealed that students faced various challenges, with grammar issues (82.1%) being the most prominent, while capitalization issues being the least (3.6%). These findings illustrate the complexity of academic writing, which demands not only language proficiency but also critical thinking, clarity, and adherence to formal conventions.

Linguistic challenges aside, several studies have highlighted cognitive and structural barriers in academic writing. Research by Mahmur et al. (2021) found that a lack of understanding of academic conventions is a major hurdle in writing scientific papers. Similarly, Weigle (2005) emphasized that academic writing requires the ability to construct logical arguments and follow strict formatting rules. The writer must understand the topic deeply and organize ideas clearly and coherently. However, many writers struggle with planning, outlining, and maintaining a logical flow, which affects the overall quality of their writing (Nurul & Dinar 2022). Sakawati et al. (2024) further noted that difficulties in accessing relevant and credible references can undermine the credibility of academic work.

However, while various techniques have been introduced to address the challenges of academic writing, most existing research tends to focus on isolated components such as grammatical accuracy, organization of ideas, or quality of argumentation (Aswat et al., 2019; Mukhid, 2023). Few have attempted to synthesize these components into a comprehensive framework that reflects the interdependencies among these skills. Moreover, external factors that may affect the effectiveness of writing strategies—such as time pressure, psychological pressure, and social support—are often neglected in the literature (Ilham et al., 2020, 2023). These gaps underscore the need for a more integrated understanding of academic writing challenges and strategies.

Effective writing requires not only mastery of language and content, but also the ability to strategically manage the writing process. Syahrin et al. (2019) explain that successful academic writers are those who can structure ideas systematically and communicate them in a coherent and well-organized manner. However, Susanti, (2018) argues that college students often find it difficult to build clear arguments and develop a logical structure, which leads to disjointed writing. Moreover, challenges such as academic pressure, lack of motivation, or confusion in narrowing the focus of writing often prevent students from progressing in their assignments (Hadi & Chairyadi, 2022).

Various strategies and tools have been proposed to address this issue. Al-Marwani (2020) emphasize techniques such as outlining ideas before drafting, reading academic texts to enrich vocabulary and perspective, and incorporating feedback from peers or instructors to improve clarity and coherence. Aldabbus &

Almansouri (2022) highlighted the usefulness of digital tools such as reference managers such as Mendeley and grammar checkers such as Grammarly in minimizing technical errors. (Akhtar et al., 2019) noted that time management and strategic use of writing aids can significantly ease the writing process. These techniques reflect internal strategies that can support the development of academic writing, but their success can be affected by various external conditions.

However, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies that evaluate how various techniques function collectively and how external influences shape their effectiveness. Alyan (2022) showed that models such as project-based writing (PBW) can improve students' critical thinking and writing organization. However, research examining the interaction between internal techniques and contextual challenges is limited (Sulistyaningrum, 2024). More integrative studies are needed to identify which techniques are most effective in different situations and how they can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of students (Fadhly, 2023).

Therefore, this systematic review was designed to address two specific research questions: (1) What academic writing techniques are most effective in helping students overcome linguistic, structural, and cognitive barriers in the writing process? (2) How do external factors such as stress, time constraints, and social support affect the success and application of these techniques? By focusing on these internal and external dimensions, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of academic writing challenges and solutions.

The findings from this review are expected to provide practical insights for students, educators and academic institutions. The findings will contribute to the development of curriculum and pedagogical strategies aimed at improving the teaching of academic writing. In particular, this study aspires to promote an evidence-based approach to writing instruction that is sensitive to internal skill development and external pressures faced by learners in academic contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify and synthesize effective techniques in overcoming difficulties in academic writing. The purpose of this review is to provide a comprehensive understanding of strategies that support academic writing, address common challenges, and explore the influence of internal and external factors on the writing process. The literature analyzed was obtained from three credible academic databases, namely Scopus, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and Google Scholar, covering publications within the last ten years (2015-2025) to ensure current relevance.

The search was conducted using a combination of Boolean keywords such as: ("academic writing" OR "academic writing difficulties") AND ("writing strategies" OR "writing techniques") AND ("higher education" OR "university students").

These keywords were carefully selected to capture a broad yet relevant range of studies, particularly those addressing writing techniques and challenges in academic contexts. Inclusion criteria included articles that: (1) were peer-reviewed; (2) focused on higher education contexts; (3) specifically addressed academic writing challenges and techniques; and (4) were written in English or Bahasa Indonesia. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria included articles that did not directly address the topic of academic writing, non-empirical publications (such as opinion pieces, editorials, or reader letters), and articles published before 2014. Gray literature such as dissertations and conference proceedings were also considered if they met the inclusion criteria and had strong methodological quality.

The article selection process went through several stages. Initially, 612 articles were found from the database search results. After removing 89 duplicates, 523 articles remained which were then filtered by title and abstract. This process resulted in 104 articles being read in full. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 29 articles were selected for further analysis. This review process followed PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and repeatability. A PRISMA flowchart will be included to illustrate the selection process.

To ensure the quality and credibility of the reviewed studies, each article was evaluated using guidelines from the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP). Quality assessment was conducted by two reviewers independently, and any disagreement was resolved through discussion or involving a third reviewer. Only studies that met the minimum quality threshold were included in the analysis. After the selection and assessment stage, data were systematically extracted using a standardized coding sheet. Data collected included author name, year of publication, country, research design, study focus, techniques used, challenges identified and key findings. A thematic analysis was then conducted to find recurring patterns, categorize the types of difficulties in academic writing, as well as the techniques used to overcome them-including issues with grammar, writing organization, coherence, psychological barriers (such as anxiety or time pressure), and the use of digital tools and feedback.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section critically synthesizes the findings of the systematic literature review by categorizing effective academic writing techniques into four overarching domains: (1) Cognitive Strategies, (2) Linguistic Interventions, (3) Feedback Mechanisms, and (4) Technology-Assisted Approaches. Each technique is discussed in terms of its direct impact and applicability across different academic levels and

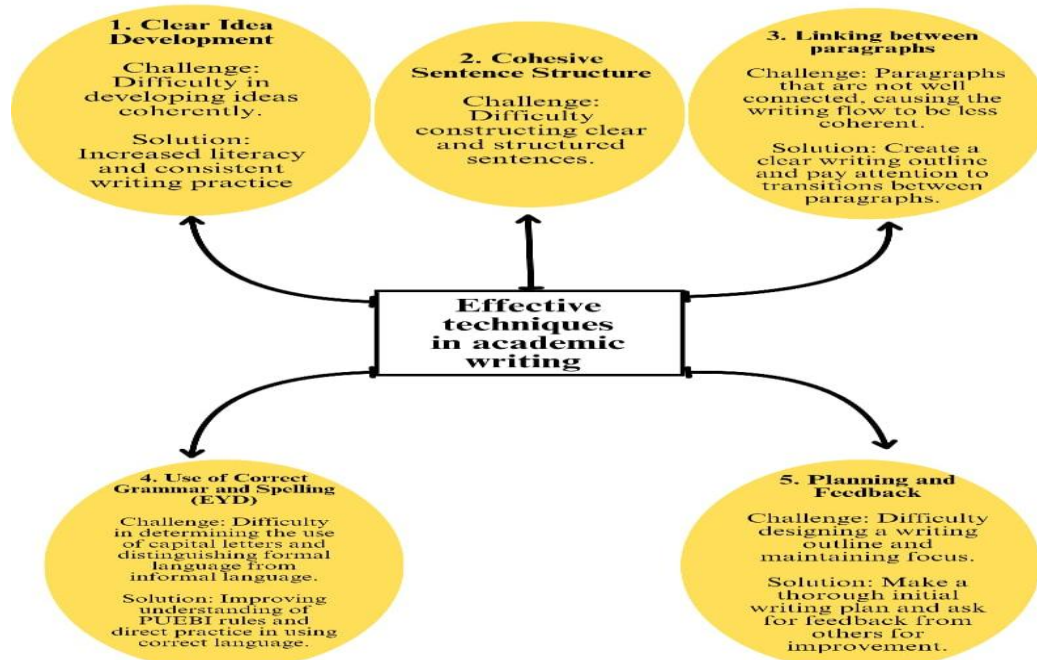
disciplines. The discussion is also informed by second language acquisition (SLA) and writing pedagogy literature to provide interdisciplinary insights.

1. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies play a crucial role in academic writing, particularly in shaping how students generate, organize, and structure their ideas. Techniques such as mind mapping, outlining, and project-based learning (PBL) were consistently mentioned in the reviewed studies. Mind mapping aids conceptual visualization and facilitates students in structuring arguments coherently (Nurkamto et al., 2022), while outlining ensures a logical sequence and prevents deviations from the main topic. PBL strategies, especially at the college level, are proven to encourage student independence and improve critical thinking skills. Sumarsono & Mbato (2021) reported that students who engaged in PBL showed increased topic exploration and better collaborative writing outcomes.

From a second language writing perspective, this strategy is in line with the planning phase of the writing process (Wei et al., 2024). However, discipline-specific adjustments are still needed. For example, the use of outlines is more relevant in scientific writing than literary works, which demand more flexibility. In addition, few studies have examined the relationship between cognitive strategies and metacognitive awareness. Therefore, reflective practices such as the use of self-assessment checklists or journal writing can promote self-regulation and deeper engagement in the writing process.

Figure 1. of academic writing effectiveness techniques



The visualization in Figure 1 depicts five core techniques in academic writing: clear idea development, cohesive sentence structure, interparagraph linkages, correct grammar usage, and strategic planning with feedback. Each of these techniques is associated with common challenges experienced by students, such as difficulties in generating ideas, maintaining a logical flow, or managing writing focus. Therefore, the integration of instruction targeting both form and process aspects of writing is important in various academic contexts.

2. *Linguistic Interventions*

Linguistic interventions are a key component in improving the effectiveness of academic writing, especially for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In this review, three main interventions were identified: explicit grammar teaching, academic vocabulary development, and genre-based writing tasks. With more than 82% of students reported to have difficulties in aspects of grammar, the need for structured and sustained teaching is evident, especially at the undergraduate level (Rehman & Mehmood, 2025).

Academic vocabulary also plays an important role in helping students deliver discipline-specific content. Meanwhile, genre-based approaches as developed in Aldabbus & Almansouri (2022) framework provide students with an understanding of the rhetorical conventions that apply across different academic fields. These interventions align with SLA principles that emphasize the importance of inputs, outputs, and exposure to contextualized model texts (Lama & Suhodolli, 2024).

However, an overemphasis on grammatical accuracy risks hampering fluency and writer confidence, especially if it is not matched by strengthening communicative competence. In addition, institutional support for linguistic skills development also varies across universities. Some institutions provide writing centers and language programs, while others assume that students already have competencies without adequate support mechanisms. Therefore, greater efforts are needed to provide equitable and discipline-specific language instruction, especially in fields such as engineering or law that demand high linguistic precision.

3. *Feedback Mechanisms*

Feedback plays an important role in the process of developing students' academic writing skills. This review identified three main forms of feedback: peer feedback, instructor feedback, and automated feedback. Peer feedback encourages collaboration and critical reflection, but its effectiveness relies heavily on training students to provide constructive criticism (Ali & Ramana, 2018). On the other hand, feedback from lecturers has a strong impact in the early stages of writing, although it is often limited by time factors and large class sizes.

Automated tools such as Grammarly provide real-time surface correction, but are unable to capture aspects of coherence, tone, or argumentation strength as a

whole. From an SLA perspective, timely and focused feedback supports students' interlanguage development (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Unfortunately, many studies have not clearly categorized the type of feedback (direct vs. indirect) and rarely examine its long-term impact on students' writing development.

Table 1. Problem aspects faced by students in academic writing and solutions applied to overcome problems

Aspects of Problems,	Percentages	Solutions Applied
Grammar Issues	82,1%	Use of apps like Grammarly
Diction Issues	76,4%	Reading references from books and journal article (google scholar)
Writing structure issues	70,0%	Mind mapping and peer feedback
Problems with Ideas	68.5%	Discussions with friends and lecturers
Time Management Issues	65.6%	Organised scheduling
Citation and Reference Issues	60.0%	Using citation guides and reference management applications (mendeley)

Table 1 corroborates these findings by showing that 82.1% of students experienced problems in grammatical aspects, while 76.4% faced difficulties in diction. The use of apps like Grammarly and the habit of reading references from journal articles are common solutions. Interestingly, professional domains such as journalism place more emphasis on speed and self-editing skills, prompting the need for context-sensitive feedback strategies (Brún, 2023).

4. Technology-Assisted Approaches

The widespread use of digital tools in academic writing has revolutionized teaching approaches in this area. Apps such as Grammarly, Turnitin, and Mendeley are widely used to support editing, reference management, and plagiarism detection (Kaur, 2016). These tools have proven to be helpful in addressing grammatical and citation issues, especially among novice writers.

However, over-reliance on these tools has the potential to hinder the internalization of writing competencies by students. For example, the use of grammar checkers without an understanding of the underlying rules can hinder meaningful learning. Similarly, citation-building apps risk encouraging superficial referencing practices if they are not accompanied by instructions on critically integrating sources.

In addition, digital literacy is still uneven among students. Therefore, educational institutions cannot assume that all students have equal access or skills in using these tools (Bram & Angelina, 2022). Ethical issues related to data privacy and the use of generative artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT also require

further study. Most existing research tends to study these tools in isolation, rather than as part of an integrated pedagogical ecosystem - an important gap for future research to fill.

5. *Cross-Cutting Factors and Limitations*

The findings also highlight the interaction between internal factors, such as motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy, with external factors such as institutional support and sociocultural norms in shaping students' writing learning outcomes. Students who have access to writing centers, mentors, or structured academic support show higher perseverance in overcoming writing challenges (Alqahtani, 2024).

Time management continues to be a recurring issue, particularly during the drafting and revision phases. Embedding writing milestones in the syllabus as well as the use of productivity tools can be effective mitigative solutions. It is also important to realize that many of the interventions recommended in the literature presuppose a foundation of writing knowledge and access to resources. Therefore, students from disadvantaged backgrounds may not benefit equally, calling for more inclusive and equity-oriented learning strategies.

6. *Unresolved Challenges and Research Gaps*

Despite the variety of techniques identified, there are still a number of significant gaps. First, few studies provide longitudinal data on the long-term impact of writing strategies (Saleh, 2014). Second, the teaching of writing is still not adequately integrated in discipline-specific curricula. Third, the emotional and identity aspects of writing, such as writing anxiety and writer identity, remain under-explored.

In addition, research on the development of writing skills at the postgraduate level is still limited, even though at this level students are expected to make original scientific contributions. Finally, cross-country factors such as multilingualism, neurodiversity and disability were barely touched upon in the reviewed literature (Palanisamy & Abdul Aziz, 2021). Filling these gaps will be an important step in developing a more inclusive academic writing pedagogy.

7. *Practical Applications*

The findings of this study provide a number of practical recommendations. Educators are advised to integrate writing instruction at all levels of the curriculum, not just in introductory courses. Writing workshops should be tailored to the needs of each discipline and organized iteratively, including techniques such as outlining, citation, and revision (Peloghitis, 2017).

Students are encouraged to view writing as an iterative process and to set personalized writing goals. Higher education institutions are expected to invest in

the establishment of writing centers, peer mentoring programs, and professional training for faculty. By recognizing academic writing as a continuous developmental process, universities can create a more supportive and productive learning environment (Al-Khulaidi & Abdulkhalek, 2022).

Discussion

Based on the results of the systematic review that has been conducted, it can be interpreted that effective academic writing techniques do not only depend on one single approach, but require the integration of various strategies that cover cognitive, linguistic, affective, and technological aspects. This finding is in line with recent paradigms in academic writing teaching that emphasize the importance of holistic and contextual approaches, especially in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Cognitive strategies such as mind mapping and outlining confirm that cognitive planning plays an important role in forming a coherent writing structure. Sari (2015) highlights that these techniques not only help students in organizing ideas, but also implicitly strengthen critical thinking skills. In the context of writing education, critical thinking skills are needed so that students are able to formulate logical and evidence-based arguments. Furthermore, this practice requires students to have metacognitive awareness, which is the ability to reflect on their own thought processes when constructing arguments. This awareness allows them to not only write, but also assess the quality of their arguments, so that the resulting writing has sufficient depth of analysis.

From a linguistic perspective, the interventions in the form of academic vocabulary learning and genre-based approaches show that language skills cannot be separated from the social and rhetorical context of academic writing. Nam et al. (2024) emphasized that EFL students need explicit support in mastering language conventions that match academic standards. The linguistic difficulties that students often face, such as in complex sentence structures and the use of formal vocabulary, reinforce the urgency of learning approaches that are oriented to real and contextual needs (Al-Mukdad, 2019). In this case, the genre-based approach becomes relevant as it helps students understand the communication purposes, structures, and language conventions in different types of academic texts. Thus, students not only learn to write mechanically, but also understand the social context of the writing they produce.

In terms of providing feedback, the study findings show that although lecturers are considered the most authoritative source of correction, student involvement through peer review also has significant pedagogical value. The practice of peer review not only builds students' independence, but also increases their rhetorical awareness, as they learn to assess others' work and reflect on weaknesses in their own writing. On the other hand, the use of digital tools such as Grammarly shows a shift towards learner independence in revising writing.

However, the effectiveness of these tools is still limited to mechanical aspects, such as grammar and spelling, and has not been able to touch the depth of content or organization of ideas. Therefore, digital tools should be positioned as a complement, not a substitute, for the role of lecturers and peers in the writing revision process.

The use of technology in the writing process provides convenience, especially in terms of accessibility and efficiency. However, the findings also indicate that this opens up ethical and pedagogical questions, especially regarding students' dependence on artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools. In this context, critical digital literacy becomes an essential competency that students must have in the modern academic writing era. Students need to be equipped with the ability to not only use technology technically, but also be able to evaluate the results and processes of its use reflectively. Thus, they do not become passive users, but rather agents who are critical of the quality of writing produced with the help of technology.

In general, the findings of this study lead to the conclusion that the development of academic writing skills cannot be done instantly or one-sidedly. A systemic approach is needed, which includes training in writing strategies, language support, providing meaningful feedback, and critical use of technology. In addition, it is important to realize that the diversity of student backgrounds, such as language proficiency levels, disciplines, and access to learning resources, also determine the effectiveness of the writing techniques applied. Therefore, an adaptive, reflective, and contextual approach is the main requirement in improving the quality of students' academic writing in a sustainable manner.

Furthermore, the integration of cognitive strategies in writing learning should be systematically designed in the curriculum. Training on mind mapping, outlining, and brainstorming techniques need to be provided in stages so that students can internalize the planning process as part of their daily writing practice. In addition, strengthening metacognitive awareness should be part of the writing learning objectives, so that students are not only able to write, but also able to monitor and revise their own writing process. The implementation of reflective journals or writing logs can be one way to encourage this awareness.

In linguistic aspects, academic vocabulary teaching should be paired with practice in real contexts. Corpus-based learning, for example, allows students to explore vocabulary usage in different types of academic texts first-hand. Meanwhile, genre-based approaches should be applied across disciplines, given that each field has different rhetorical conventions. This is important so that students are able to adapt their writing style to the demands of their respective disciplines, be it in writing research reports, argumentative essays, or journal articles. In the context of providing feedback, training for lecturers and students on constructive feedback techniques is key for this process to run effectively. Peer review needs to be facilitated in a structured manner, with clear rubrics, so that students can provide feedback that is not only superficial, but also touches on the content and structure of

the writing. Thus, this process not only improves the quality of writing, but also builds a collaborative learning community.

The use of technology must also be balanced with the development of critical digital literacy. Students need to be trained to understand the limitations of digital tools, such as Grammarly or AI writer, and taught how to verify and revise their output. In addition, it is important to integrate learning about academic ethics and digital plagiarism, so that students are not tempted to use technology irresponsibly. In a broader context, the successful implementation of effective academic writing techniques is also influenced by institutional factors. Higher education institutions need to provide adequate support, such as academic writing service centers, lecturer training, and access to quality digital resources and libraries. Interdisciplinary and sustainable writing training programs also need to be developed to address the needs of students from various backgrounds.

Finally, it is important to note that efforts to improve academic writing skills must take into account the diversity of students, both in terms of language ability, academic literacy levels, and access to technology. Therefore, adaptive and contextual approaches should be prioritized, so that each student receives support that suits their needs. A reflective approach should also be emphasized, where students are invited to periodically evaluate the development of their writing skills, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful and sustainable. Thus, the development of effective academic writing skills requires a synergy between cognitive, linguistic, pedagogical and technological strategies, which are carried out adaptively, reflectively and contextually. This effort is not only the responsibility of students alone, but also requires commitment from lecturers, institutions, and the academic environment as a whole, in order to achieve superior quality academic writing in today's global and digital era.

Moreover, to optimize the integration of effective writing techniques, close collaboration between educational stakeholders, including curriculum developers, teachers, and educational technology providers, is required. The development of learning modules that combine cognitive, linguistic and technological strategies in an integrated manner will be a progressive step in addressing the challenges of academic writing in the 21st century. In addition, it is important to actively involve students in the learning design process, so that the material delivered is truly relevant to their needs. For example, conducting academic writing workshops that are practical and applicable can be an effective means to train students in applying the techniques they have learned. This kind of workshop can focus on various aspects, ranging from writing planning, argument development, use of sources, to technology-based revision techniques. These activities can also be combined with peer review sessions and group discussions, thus creating an interactive and collaborative learning environment.

Other than the workshop-based approach, the provision of interactive digital learning resources is also an urgent need. Online platforms that provide academic vocabulary exercises, genre structure simulations, and tutorials on the use of digital tools can help students learn independently at their own pace. Providing access to digital corpus and text analysis software can also broaden students' knowledge of academic writing practices that meet international standards. From a lecturer professional development perspective, training that focuses on constructive feedback strategies, peer review facilitation techniques, and pedagogical technological literacy should also be prioritized. Lecturers need to be equipped with the skills to utilize technology critically in the learning process of writing, and be able to guide students so that they do not just rely on tools, but are able to use technology wisely and ethically.

On the other hand, institutional policies must also support a healthy academic writing ecosystem. The establishment of an academic writing center that provides consultation, editing services, and continuous training can be a concrete solution to improve students' writing capacity. In addition, providing incentives for students who actively develop their writing skills, such as scientific paper awards, can motivate them to be more serious in improving this ability. By paying attention to all these dimensions, it is hoped that efforts to develop academic writing skills can take place in a sustainable and inclusive manner. This process should be an integral part of the academic culture in higher education, not just a temporary or additional activity. Thus, students will grow into academic writers who are not only technically competent, but also have critical, ethical, and reflective awareness in every paper they produce.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights that effective academic writing pedagogy must be multidimensional, encompassing cognitive, linguistic, technological, and feedback-oriented strategies. While cognitive strategies such as outlining and mind mapping promote idea organization and metacognitive awareness, linguistic interventions are essential to address grammar, vocabulary, and genre-specific conventions, particularly among EFL learners. Feedback mechanisms, both human and automated, facilitate iterative improvement, although their effectiveness varies depending on context and training. Integration of digital tools increases accessibility but must be accompanied by critical digital literacy to avoid shallow learning. More importantly, the findings suggest that academic writing support must be adaptive and equitable, recognizing the diverse needs of students across disciplines and proficiency levels. Future research should further investigate longitudinal impacts and explore more inclusive models of writing instruction that bridge cognitive, affective, and technological dimensions.

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