Exploring the Impacts of Academic Writing Instruction on the use of Academic Writing Norms and Conventions: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a far-reaching element which requires the efficient use of linguistic structures and rhetorical patterns for a more advanced writing proficiency. Similarly, producing academically acceptable papers might be challenging and frustrating for postgraduate students. In this respect, it can be a notably opportune time for L2 writing scholars and practitioners to illuminate the greater importance of the accurate use of academic writing norms and conventions for more effective academic papers. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate postgraduate students' perceptions regarding the impacts of academic writing instruction on the use of academic writing norms and conventions as well as their difficulties in the use of academic writing conventions when they write a research paper. This study adopted qualitative research design with a semi-structured interview format and textual analysis. A small-scale exploratory approach was adopted to help researcher to gain exploratory insights and determine key themes regarding the participants' view, experiences and suggestions. The participants consisted of postgraduate students in English Language Teaching department at a state university. A 14-week course was delivered to teach the accurate use of academic writing conventions. The students were asked to write a summary of an article chosen by the instructor at the beginning and end of the semester. After the instruction, data were obtained by interviewing the participants. The analysis of summaries written before and after the instruction was used to support the interview findings. The results revealed that the participants benefitted from the academic writing instruction in terms of using the academic norms and conventions in their research papers. They generally had positive attitudes toward receiving instruction focusing on academic writing norms and conventions. Based on the findings, it can be suggested that the postgraduate students have difficulties in academic writing; therefore, they need to receive comprehensive instruction, particularly to learn how to use academic writing conventions in their own disciplines.

Keywords: Applied linguistic**,** academic writing, higher education, postgraduate students.

Introduction

Academic writing is a touchstone in the scholarly community and intrinsic for the transmission of related inquiry and academic discourse. For postgradute students, the knowledge of academic writing norms and conventions is integral for generating high-quality and effective research papers. Therefore, recent years have seen a drive to regulate and maintain a standard and science-based model in assessing postgraduate academic writing such as master's theses and doctoral dissertations (Casanave, 2010). Although there is an expectation from academics to write more experimentally and innovatively rather than using conventional styles, Miller et al. (1998) assert that changes in the established forms of academic writing is not likely to occur. This is because supervisors and faculties tend to have expectations about how an academic text should attune to acceptable disciplinary norms and conventions, which means this is a requisite for postgraduate students (Muller et al., 2017). On the other hand, postgraduate students' writing skills are generally evaluated as insufficient for a research paper (Lin & Morrison, 2021). Poor writing skills may influence students' potential to generate credible and impactful scholarly texts, theses, and dissertations, resulting in their overall academic success.

With reference to this fact, several universities have designed English for specific purposes (EAP) courses in particular for postgraduate students (Rakedzon & Baram-Tsabari, 2017). These courses fundamentally aspire to improve postgraduate students' writing skills, enabling

them to gain more sophisticated and expected levels of academic language use (Storch & Tapper, 2009). Many researchers have investigated postgraduate students' academic writing skills with a focus on challenges in academic writing (Lin & Morrison, 2021), their perceptions on these skills (Aydin & Baysan, 2018), assessment in academic writing (Topping et al., 2000), supervisors' role in academic writing (Lee & Murray, 2015). However, a notable shortcoming persists in the investigation of the impacts of academic writing instruction on the accurate use of academic writing norms and conventions except for a few studies (Kaufold, 2015; Kaya & Yağız, 2023). Similarly, in Turkish context, significant body of research was dedicated to investigate academic writing-related issues in postgraduate education (Erturk, & Ozturk, 2022; Toprak & Yücel, 2020). To the best knowledge, on the other hand, these studies generally focused on difficulties in academic writing, which reveals a need for the investigation on the effects of academic writing instruction focused on norms and conventions among postgraduate students. Therefore, this study enlarges this line of research in the particular context of the effects of academic writing instruction on knowledge, skills and awareness of Turkish postgraduate students majoring in English Language Teaching regarding the use of academic writing norms and conventions. Their perceptions regarding the effects of instruction based on the accurate use of academic writing norms and conventions may provide valuable insights into academic writing research in several ways. Understanding their perceptions may help practitioners and instructors to identify niches and misconceptions regarding existing knowledge in academic writing, and address specific needs and expectations in postgraduate education. Also, postgraduate students may increase their awareness about the importance of maintaining high academic standards.

Compatible with these purposes, the research questions of this study were given below;

1. What are postgraduate students' perceptions about the impacts of the instruction regarding academic writing norms and conventions?

2. What are postgraduate students' perceived difficulties in academic writing within the Turkish EFL context?

3. What are the postgraduate students' needs and expectations about the improvement of their academic writing skills?

Literature Review

Academic writing is a habitual endeavor that many academics need to perform (Sword, 2011), and these practices are tied to common beliefs governed by research community (Badenhorst, 2018). From a social perspective, Hyland (2004) suggests that the success in academic writing depends on the integration of approved discourses of a particular social world into the writing process, which means that academic writing is the joint of writers' personal goals and shared professional discourses. Over time, these common practices may change subtly and invisibly, thereby it can be a fallacy for graduate students to think that academic writing is a skill which is once learned and does not require an ongoing effort (Badenhorst, 2018). That is why, formal training on stylish writing has become more common in recent years (Sword, 2011). This issue leads the way to investigating academic writing instruction-related issues more than it used to be. As such, this has been the driving force behind the rationale for this study.

Regardless of disciplinary differences, academic writing plays an important part in academic practice (Hyland, 2004). This is also applicable when written communication is considered as an opportunity to engage with the researchers within the same field. The shared discursive convention also paves the way for efficient communication with the readers (Patriotta, 2017). The dynamic nature of academic writing deserves great attention in scholarly community. Accordingly, there has been considerable research devoted to academic writing conventions over the past few decades. (Al Badi, 2015; Coffin et al., 2005; Hyland, 2008; Lillis, 1997; Thonney, 2011). The releavant literature unveils several studies handling this issue from different perspectives (Alostath, 2021; Castelló et al., 2009; Holmes et al., 2018; Huerta et al., 2017; Kaufold, 2015; Swales & Feak, 2012; Singh, 2019; Zhang, 2011).

Of the extensive research which has centered on postgraduate students within the context of academic writing, some studies are notably worth mentioning. The first one benefitted from both research and students' experiences (Swales & Feak, 2012). Therefore, this study is successful in addressing the most critical points in efficient academic writing, and with a variety of tasks and activities, provides assistance for graduate students. Considering the lack of formal training for L2 students (Hyland, 2016), such activities or tasks can be vital for them. Another important study was conducted by Kaufold (2015) who adopted a similar methodological approach with this study. The researcher reported findings obtained from the analysis of students' texts and interviews conducted with 12 graduate students from different social sciences departments. Aiming at exploring the links between students' prior experiences and their texts, this longitudinal study revealed striking findings which demonstrated that the students' understanding about the use of academic conventions

changed to a great extent, and they figured out that their bounded conventions could be reshaped using disciplinary and local ones. Also, they benefitted from their prior academic writing experiences to complete their theses as well as the explicit guidelines provided during the study. These results imply that explicit guidelines are helpful for the graduate students to write their academic texts but these guidelines may be interpreted under the influence of past experiences. Similarly, Singh (2019) conducted a study to explore the challenges of international postgraduate students, and the findings of her study indicated that students' previous experiences may not adequately prepare them to comprehend new academic norms and conventions expected in graduate programs.

With this in mind, it would be of great importance in considering how graduate students tackle their difficulties when they have little experience to write their theses and to meet the demands of academic community (Akbas & Hardman, 2018). In the related literature, there seems to be agreement on postgraduate students' difficulties in academic writing (Bronson, 2004). Particularly, the students who are non-native speakers of English find academic writing challenging (Casanave & Hubbard, 1992). Previous studies contributed to the relevant field by providing numerous reasons for academic writing difficulties. For instance, according to Brown (2008), both language barriers and the lack of knowledge regarding academic writing norms and standards pose difficulties for postgraduate students in academic writing. Among the difficulties that Singh (2019) explored in her study can be using acceptable academic style, developing coherent paragraphs and inaccurate use of English grammar and vocabulary. In accordance with the results of the above-mentioned research paper, Aunurrahman et al., (2017) conducted a text analysis to explore the students' academic writing competencies, and provide insights into the limitations of students such as mastering schematic structure, linguistic features, and organizing information. Approaching the issue from the perspective of graduate students' views, Alostath (2021) revealed similar difficulties that postgraduate students are in need of tackling in their academic writing, reporting that students' main problems were their limited proficiency in English academic writing and deficiencies regarding the use of academic writing style to construct arguments and claims. Despite these compelling obstacles, there is a dearth of support for graduate students in their programs (Sidman-Taveau & Karathanos-Aguilar, 2015). Therefore, more attention should be devoted to research on the ways to address the challenges faced by graduate students in academic writing. There has been considerable literature on academic writing

related issues in Turkish context. Academic writing-related difficulties (Alnıjres, 2018; Ekoç, 2019), supervisor' role in academic writing (Şahin & Yağız, 2024), teaching academic writing in postgraduate education (Yuvayapan & Rathert, 2018), and postgraduate students' needs and expectations (Yuvayapan & Bilginer, 2020) have been among various important issues explored in Turkish context.

Despite the significant contributions offered by this area of research, diverse shortcomings are obvious in the studies reviewed. These design flaws lie in the lack of a longitudinal data to understand the long-term impacts of academic writing instruction (Yuvayapan & Rathert, 2018), limited sample size and reliance on only self-reported data (Tahıra & Haıder, 2019), inadequate attention to particular academic writing norms and conventions. Despite the extensive research on graduate students' competencies and challenges in academic writing in many different contexts, limited research has been conducted to understand the accurate use of academic norms and conventions in theses and dissertations in Turkish context (Çelik, 2020; Karakuzu et al., 2020; Öztürk & Köse, 2016; Toprak & Yücel, 2020; Yucelsen et al., 2015). Keeping this in mind, the significance of this study is accentuated by its potential to emphasize the niches in the existing studies on academic writing in postgraduate education. In this study, it is expected to provide valuable insights into the understanding of the perceived impacts of academic writing instruction on the use of academic writing norms and conventions. Thereby, it is aimed to present a thorough and detailed framework for developing academic writing instruction in order to enhance postgraduate students' academic writing skills.

Methods
Research Design
This study is based on the data obtained from an academic writing course for postgraduate students., a qualitative research design congruent with the research questions of the study was employed in the current study. Given that there are few studies specifically centering on postgraduate students' perceptions and voices about the impacts of academic writing course based upon academic writing norms and conventions on their writing skills, the current study adopted an interview-based qualitative approach to explore postgraduate students' conceptions about this issue. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in eliciting in-depth, nuanced data and enable researchers to explore educational practices and experiences (Merriam, 1998).

In-depth interviews are used to obtain comprehensive and

detailed data related to participants' views, experiences and perspectives about a new or under-researched topics. Accordingly, this study employed a small-scale exploratory approach which help the researchers gain exploratory insights and determine key themes, which may pave the way for further larger-scale investigations. Textual analysis based on the summaries written by the students before and after the instruction they received was also carried out to support the data collected with the interviews.

Participants

This study adopted purposive sampling to select the participants. This technique is an appropriate choice when the researcher aims to gather convenient and favorable data for an in-depth understanding (Kelly, 2010; Palinkas et al., 2015). Seven postgraduate students participated in the study. They were enrolled in postgraduate programs of English Language Teaching department as MA and PhD students. The course delivered within the scope of this study was devoted to teach norms and conventions in their own disciplinary academic writing. Although there were more students who were enrolled in this course, some students did not complete all the tasks during the semester. Thus, only the students who consistently participated in the lessons and completed the assignments given prior to and after the instruction process were selected as the participants.

Data Collection Tools

Aiming to explore postgraduate students' perceptions about academic writing instruction, and their needs and expectations in this regard, the study conducted semi-structured interviews. The questions were prepared to reveal participants' perceptions about the efficacy of receiving academic writing instruction, and the impacts of receiving feedback to improve their writing skills. There were 12 questions which were prepared by the researcher (Appendix A). To ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument used in this study, the researcher developed a detailed interview guide involving a clear set of questions and prompts compatible with the research purposes. Similarly, pilot interviews were conducted with two participants prior to the main study to test and refine interview questions. Feedback from the pilot study was used to improve the questions. Also, the participants were responsible for writing summaries of two research papers before and after the instructional process. Based on the analysis of their first and second summaries, they received feedback to identify their mistakes and errors in terms of using academic writing conventions and to answer the interview questions about the efficacy of feedback and instruction.

The ethical process in the study was as follows:

- Ethics committee approval was obtained from Atatürk University University Educational Sciences Ethics Committee (Date: 06.09.2022, Number: E-61570131-100-2200269918)
- Informed consent has been obtained from the participants.

Procedure

Before the delivery of academic writing lessons, all participants wrote a summary of a research paper using their background knowledge and experiences. Then, the students took academic writing course which was designed as 42 class periods in a 14- week semester. The content was prepared to ameliorate the postgraduate students' academic writing skills, their knowledge and awareness about the accurate use of norms and conventions in academic writing. Several textbooks were used in the design of teaching materials. Following the instruction process, the students were asked to produce a summary of a different research paper to compare their first and second texts and to give feedback about their progress in using academic writing conventions accurately. After the fulfillment of the semester, the interviews were conducted to figure out the participants' conceptions about to what extent they benefited from the instruction that they received.

Data Analysis

Because the instruction pointed out the important aspects of acceptable academic writing such as formality, accuracy, connectedness, and paraphrasing, the participants' texts were analyzed in terms of using a formal and accurate use of language as well as effective paraphrasing, referencing, and hedging. The analyses were conducted in two cycles. The first one involved a detailed reading of the summaries for the preparation of instruction content and interviews. Errors and mistakes in each text of the participants were identified to give feedback and to compare with the texts written after the instruction. The analysis of the final texts focused on the occurrence of these aspects in an accurate way. Multiple rounds of analysis were carried out to assure the reliability of the data. Cross-checking results were included based on the established academic writing norms to reduce potential biases. Also, a subset of analysis was reviewed by an independent expert for the validation and reliability of the findings.

As for the analysis of the interviews, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis, which is a type of qualitative research, provides themes based on the codes derived from the qualitative data set. It is an appropriate way for the studies which aim to analyze the data in detail using

studies which aim to analyze the data in detail using interpretations (Alhojailan, 2012). The data was analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2006) six phases. According to Braun and Clark (2006), firstly, the researcher familiarizes with the data. Second phase requires generation of initial codes. After the researcher searches for themes, these themes are reviewed, defined, and named. As for the last phase is the production of the report. Based on these phases, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and reviewed the transcriptions a few times to become acquaintant with the data. After the review of the transcriptions, the codes were identified and categorized under the themes.

Results

For a general understanding of participants' perceptions of their scholarly writing skills, the impacts of instruction devoted to academic writing conventions, and the role of feedback in improvement of writing skills, semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants. Therefore, the data obtained from the interviews through content presented a general insight into how participants deal with academic writing skills and challenges in their discipline and what the perceived impacts of academic writing course on their skills and knowledge. The analysis of the data collected from participants was classified under four main themes.

The thematic analysis of the interviews with postgraduate students revealed four main themes including "*Perceived impacts of academic writing course on postgraduate students' knowledge and skills*", "*Awareness of feedback*", "*Postgraduate students' ongoing challenges in using academic writing norms and conventions*", and "*Suggestions for improving knowledge, skills and awareness in academic writing*". Figure 1 demonstrates the themes identified through thematic analysis.

Theme 1	• Perceived impacts of academic writing course on postgraduate students' knowledge and skills
Theme 2	• Awareness of feedback
Theme 3	• Postgraduate students' ongoing challenges in using academic writing norms and conventions
Theme 4	• Suggestions for improving knowledge, skills and awareness in academic writing

Figure 1.
Themes obtained from Interviews

Theme 1: Perceived impacts of academic writing course on postgraduate students' knowledge and skills

The first theme centered on postgraduate students' perceptions about the effects of instruction devoted to academic writing norms and conventions on their improvement. In this respect, the findings displayed a positive relationship between the training of academic writing norms and conventions and improvement in students' perceived writing performance. All of the participants uttered that the instruction they received contributed to their writing skills to a great extent. 6 out of all participants stated they did not receive such an instruction, thereby they had a lack of essential knowledge and skills regarding effective academic writing when they were enrolled in postgraduate program. Most of the participants were delivered writing course when they were undergraduate students; however, the content was not comprehensive and detailed enough to write a research paper. P1's utterances exemplify the lack of content of the literatue review writing courses for the improvement of essential literatue review writing skills as following:

I took a writing course at the undergraduate level, but this course was not that comprehensive and detailed. We were taught only how to write an essay. Therefore, the academic writing course that we received this semester contributed a lot to my academic development. More importantly, my viewpoint about effective academic writing has changed in a positive way. My awareness regarding the accurate use of academic writing norms and conventions has considerably increased.

With regard to academic writing norms and conventions, most of the participants agreed that the instruction enabled them to acquire certain aspects of academic writing. Hedging, formality, and paraphrasing are the most frequently mentioned ones among all the conventions. According to the participants, the texts which they produced were somewhat more informal and they did not know how to effectively use hedging devices and paraphrasing techniques prior to the instruction. To quote this, P4;

> I realized the criticality of academic writing instruction in postgraduate education to get familiar with the conventions expected in our field. I was not familiar with hedging before this training, that is why, this training was very helpful to learn discipline-specific norms and conventions.

Another striking finding obtained from the data was the positive effect of the instruction on students' self-confidence. P7 had an impression that they lacked the expected skills for effective writing, and thereby, they were not self-confident when writing an academic paper. In relation to this, P5 uttered that "More importantly, the instruction that we received increased our self-confidence". Two participants particularly highlighted the importance of the assignments for the improvement of writing skills. For them, the assignments they completed during the courses was informative since the assignments offered them many opportunities to practice what they learned in the lessons.

The analysis of the academic papers written by the students prior to and after the instruction confirmed the interview results. On the basis of the analysis, some examples from the texts can be offered to support the participants' perceptions. The analysis of the first texts revealed a variety of informal statements and an informal language in the texts created by the participants. The use of contractions, personal pronouns, direct questions and informal words or statements were the most common examples for the lack of knowledge about the use of formal language. The following sentences extracted from the participants' texts can confirm this finding;

"Learners shouldn't imitate or speak as like native speakers, but they should adapt their speech appropriate for non-native speaker." (P3)

"However, researchers are not allowed to get accesses if they don't have any specialized knowledge of phonetics." (P6)

"I agree with this statement completely." (P7)

"In conclusion, what should be done to correct the problems and misunderstandings?" (P1)

A close reading of the texts indicates that the students also expressed absolute certainty and made over-generalizations, which means they were deprived of the knowledge regarding the correct use of hedging devices in academic papers. For instance, P7's utterance "There are always non-native speakers' accents which are different from each other." can be evaluated as a strong claim in academic discourse. Similarly, the overuse of passive voice and punctuation mistakes are evidently unacceptable in academic writing, which the students had weaknesses in the use of these conventions. P2, for example, repeatedly used passive voice in her text. The following extract from P2's text shows the overuse of passive voice in consecutive sentences in the same paragraph, and underpins the need for more attention to the use of passive voice in academic writing accurately:

It is stated that not only the method of pronunciation teaching but also teaching grammar and vocabulary is generally based on common-sense intuitive notions. It is also mentioned that pronunciation teaching depends on tutors' experience and impressions about language teaching which causes to some obstacles and not to be able to find the solution for the problems encountered. For that reason, it is indicated that empirical studies make clear about pronunciation instructions for tutors. In this article, it is mainly emphasized on countries where English is spoken as second language such as North America, Australia, Britain and New Zealand have their concerns about mutual intelligibility, miscommunication and language-based discrimination.

The first array of examples illustrated findings around the frequent misuse of academic writing norms and conventions among the postgraduate students. The second array of examples, on the other hand, displays how the academic writing instruction positively influenced the use of academic writing conventions by the students. The participants, during the interviews, emphasized their satisfaction with the positive effects of the instruction on their writing. The text analysis revealed results in accordance with the students' perceptions. The analysis results showed differences between the texts written before and after the instruction. The language of the texts produced after the instruction was noticeably more academic than those written at the beginning of the semester. The participants were able to utilize more linguistic resources to hedge their claims, and avoid using informal language. More importantly, they displayed better writing skills in using academic writing conventions. P3, who frequently used contractions in her first draft, did not make such errors in her second text: "In terms of the case, a significant difference is not observed in the control group.". Similarly, P7 softened his claim by using a hedging device, and wrote that: "Regarding first languages' different orthographic features such as alphabetic, logographic and syllabic language, readers from different L1 backgrounds may not have experienced the same decoding processes while reading English".

In addition, the participants displayed improvements in paraphrasing, referencing and connectedness in their papers. These findings imply that academic writing is a skill

which requires training, and academic writing conventions can be developed through practice including reading and writing tasks. Therefore, the need of students and expectations of their faculties from the students must be taken into consideration in postgraduate programs.

Theme 2: Awareness of feedback

This study yields important findings regarding the effectiveness of feedback in improvement of postgraduate students' writing skills. The analysis of the interviews elicited that almost all of the students found feedback to be critical to improve their writing skills. They stated that they benefitted from the instruction devoted to academic writing conventions through feedback. According to many participants, feedback provided information about the convenience of their writing product. P2 explained the importance of feedback for their development as follows:

> Feedback that we received during the semester increased our efforts to produce higher quality texts. Because feedback is compatible with the writing experience and thereby, I felt like the instructor monitored our writing experiences by giving feedback, which promoted learning the conventions more effectively.

Accordingly, P4 believed that postgraduate students should receive feedback to cope with their challenges, and added "The academic writing course should offer writing activities and tasks combined with feedback". This finding shows that he regards feedback as an inseparable part of writing instruction process. Supporting P4's ideas, P6 emphasized the significance of feedback in writing process with the subsequent statements:

> I think feedback became a very important part of writing instruction that I received. Because I think feedback represents the current situation of students' writing development. Based on the feedback I received in each assignment; I was able to easily see my deficiencies and this helped me understand on which conventions I needed to focus in subsequent tasks. In a sense, feedback serves as a guide in writing instruction process.

In a similar vein, P5 commented on the necessity of feedback for better writing skills and stated that feedback shows the gap between the existing and expected level of the students' performance; therefore, it fosters better writing skills by providing the students with the opportunities to deal with the challenges faced in their writing process. One of the participants (P7) approached the issue from a different perspective and uttered that:

> Academic writing course is a very important course that not only facilitates learning in this course but also helps the students complete the tasks and assignments in other graduate courses. For this reason, when I was preparing my assignments in other courses, I always remembered positive and negative feedback I received in this course, and tried to write my papers benefitting from what I learned from the lessons and feedback in academic writing course.

Another striking finding was presented by P3 who referred to a perspective on the contribution of feedback to students' affective issues. According to this participant, receiving feedback is an indicator of the teachers' attitudes toward the students. When the instructors provide feedback, the students may feel the support of their instructors for their development, and this may increase their motivation and self-confidence for learning from their mistakes and errors, and for improving their writing skills. P3 explained her beliefs as following:

> At the very beginning of the semester, I did not know the instructor's teaching style, that is why, I was worried. However, as she gave feedback for our papers, I felt that she cares about us and this increased my motivation and self-confidence, and encouraged me to work on the most challenging conventions. Therefore, feedback is very significant in academic writing course.

To sum up, the second theme mentioned above emphasizes the significance of feedback for the postgraduate students. The students generally stated that feedback is a cornerstone in academic writing course since feedback enables the students to realize their challenges and weaknesses regarding the academic writing conventions, and they can learn from their experiences.

Theme 3: Postgraduate students' ongoing challenges in using academic writing norms and conventions

The third theme deals with the ongoing challenges of postgraduate students when writing an academic paper. The interviews with the participants provide insights into their experiences when they wrote the second draft after the academic writing instruction they received. Whereas the students acquired new ways of writing an acceptable academic paper, they also dealt with some ongoing challenges. Of all conventions, vocabulary choice is one of

the most challenging conventions for the participants. A majority of the students remarked that academic writing is a difficult task and indecision about word choice makes this process more complicated. When they were writing their second texts, they had to struggle with using accurate synonym, correct use of prefixes and suffixes, and using relevant conjunctions. This finding coincides with the results obtained from textual analysis. The sentence taken from P1's text provides evidence for this consistency. The student wrote " …So, there was not any enterprise to separate either NSs or NSSs in terms of gender and age." in her text. In this sentence, the conjunction "so" is accepted as an informal word in academic discourse. The same participant, in the interview conducted after the intervention, expressed that she had great difficulties in word choice when she wrote her second paper. The participant extended her speech by stating that:

> When I paraphrased other researchers' ideas, especially, if the language was difficult to understand and if I had to find synonyms for the words which I was not familiar with, it was really difficult to find synonyms for those words. I could not be sure whether I gave the same meaning with the synonyms that I used.

The second challenging convention frequently reported by the participants was referencing and citation in academic writing. Some participants expressed their ongoing difficulties when they referenced other sources which supported their claims. In their first drafts, almost all participants made mistakes when they provided in-text citation, and direct and indirect quotations. The report of the first texts unveiled a great number of errors and mistakes in referencing the previous studies, which proved that many of the students had major problems with this convention. The number of the mistakes and errors in referencing significantly decreased in their second drafts. The students to a great extent became familiar with the accurate ways of referencing, giving citation, and quoting through teaching practices; however, two participants still made mistakes in referencing in their second drafts. As an example, P3 gave the page number of the source text although she did not quote an idea from the source text, but only paraphrased the idea. In addition to the mistake related to the page number, the participant made mistake about the place of date as shown below:

> In context, the usage of intensifiers is opposite to hedges mentioned previously. Leech has stated that overstatement might be unsuitable in formal written texts. (1983, p. 148).

P4 shared similar obstacles reporting that "I still have problems in referencing. I feel inadequate myself in this respect. Sometimes, I want to reference another source, but I hesitate to plagiarize". An extract from his paper confirms his fears. The participant unknowingly plagiarized since he did not include the date of the source text in his text "Jordan's book which is for teacher of academic writings, has an important section for a classification of hedges". Also, wordiness, repetition and hedging are still challenging conventions for the participants

The third theme of this study shed light into the ongoing challenges of the postgraduate students. Based on the interpretation of the findings, we can deduce that although the participants substantially learned academic writing conventions through the instruction they received, they might need more practice to become effective writers.

Theme 4: Suggestions for improving knowledge, skills and awareness in academic writing
All of the participants reported that they benefitted from the instruction that they received in terms of improving their knowledge, skills and awareness development. They mostly suggested that academic writing course is neglected in many graduate programs; therefore, they called upon more attention to be trained postgraduate students for effective writing. When asked their suggestions for the improvement of writing skills, five students addressed the lack of supervisor support in their writing processes. P2 explained this lack with following statements:

> Supervisors generally do not provide formative or corrective feedback when their students write an academic paper. They do not guide the students for formal and accurate writing. Their expectations from postgraduate students are high, but most supervisors do not adequately support their students to meet these expectations.

Supporting this, another participant (P7) remarked that some supervisors are not competent enough to promote student writing. Two participants (P2, P6) complained that feedback provided by the supervisors is somewhat insufficient and not constructive. Also, the interviews revealed another important suggestion regarding the efficiency of the academic writing instruction. A majority of the participants believed that this course should be delivered during two semesters, and the topics should be discussed more thoroughly. Another suggestion related to the delivery of the course was the inadequacy of practicing tasks and activities. The participants reported that students should be promoted for more practical application of theoretical knowledge. According to the participants, the lessons in academic writing course should involve examples from acceptable and unacceptable research papers. They

also suggested that the faculty members need to encourage the students to read more for successful writing since they consider reading has a critical impact on their writing.

Discussion

This study aimed to discover the postgraduate students' perceptions related to the impacts of the instruction devoted to academic writing norms and conventions. The findings obtained by analyzing the interviews and texts written by the postgraduate students showed that the instruction delivered significantly contributed to the students' knowledge, awareness and writing skills. After the instructional process, the students produced higher quality of texts and they stated that their awareness about the accurate use of these norms and conventions increased to a great extent. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the intensive writing course, tasks, activities, weekly assignments, and feedback gave the postgraduate students the opportunity to develop their abilities in academic writing. These results lead way to offering appropriate support for postgraduate students who compete against the academic writing expectations of their faculties. It can be suggested to design well-suited content to address participants' needs and expectations. Also, their improvement throughout the instruction can reflect a high level of receptivity and engagement to the material; that is why, interactive and practical training can facilitate learning and retention.

Several studies in the relevant literature have provided inspiring contributions to the knowledge of the development of academic writing skills (Muller et al., 2017; Sidman-Taveau & Karathanos-Aguilar, 2015; Storch & Tapper, 2009; Wischgoll, 2017). For example, the findings of this study coincide with Storch & Tapper's (2009) results for graduate students. The researchers evaluated postgraduate students' writing based on a course of a semester and found that the students displayed improvement in using accurate grammar and academic vocabulary. This is similar to the higher quality writing results by the L2 graduate students in an intervention with the pre- and post-tasks devoted to writing an academic paper abstract and a press release (Rakedzon & Baram-Tsabari, 2017). The researchers reported improved academic and popular science writing skills and improvement in students' English language proficiency. In another study, Wischgoll (2017) tested an intervention in a computer-based learning environment including undergraduate and postgraduate students and found improvement in students' skills to write higher quality texts.

Wischgoll (2017) also illuminated the positive effects of feedback on students' writing skills, which is compatible with the results of the current study. Consistent findings regarding the positive effects of feedback highlight the importance of constructive feedback mechanisms in instruction to guide and empower students in their development.

With a similar population to the one in Wischgoll's study (2017), Polio and Fleck (1998) supported the findings of this study since they reported significant improvement in students' writing performances as a result of a 15-week course. Specifically focusing on the effects of instruction on grammatical accuracy in academic writing, Muller et al. (2017) conducted an experimental study including an 8-week instruction and found that ESL doctoral students in the health sciences significantly improved their writing with comprehensive written language support. Feedback, in a similar vein, deserved attention in Ma's study (2018) which reported that the postgraduate students valued feedback as a key component in academic writing. As a general conclusion of all studies mentioned above, feedback can improve students' writing since it enables students to explore their inadequacies and thereby, the increase in their awareness for accurate use of conventions may lead way to write quality papers. Therefore, in disciplinary content courses, feedback should be provided to postgraduate students as a continual support.

The interviews with the postgraduate students were central in this study since they linked the texts written by these students and their perceptions about their writing performances. The second important point in this study relates to the awareness of students regarding the importance of feedback in their writing improvement. The results revealed an increased awareness of feedback as an essential part of academic writing course. In the matter of their experiences before and after the instruction they received, they stated that their understanding regarding academic writing conventions considerably changed. As the topic were discussed during the instruction, their writing skills were shaped by the use of disciplinary conventions. This result was supported by Kaufhold (2015), who concluded that the participants changed their initial understanding of conventions by using them for different functions.

The results regarding students' perceived challenges showed that the participants significantly had difficulties in word choice, which is consistent with the results of Zhang' study (2011) in which word choice was reported as the major challenge among the graduate students. In this

study, the students also identified the use of hedging devices and referencing as their ongoing problems in academic writing. Thereby, these imply that some students needed more instruction and practice for a better understanding of academic writing norms and conventions. Alostath (2021) seems to be unanimous on the similar difficulties experienced by postgraduate students since the researcher found that the participants in his study had difficulties in citation and referencing. On the other hand, referencing and citation were found as the least challenging conventions in academic writing for ESL learners in Al Badi's study (2015) as in the study reported by Singh (2019). These difficulties can be attributed to inadequacy of writing practices, the duration of instruction devoted to academic writing, and lack of supervisor guidance.

Supervisor guidance was identified as an important part of the students' academic writing improvement in this study. However, the participants shared their feelings about the lack of essential assistance as in the study conducted by Neupane-Bastola (2022). Bearing this in mind, these results suggest an urgent need to deal with supervisor guidance in postgraduate programs. Similarly, whereas the importance of feedback was noted by the students in this study, their access to feedback in their disciplinary courses and by their supervisors is not adequate and satisfying and for promoting students' writing should receive more attention. This implies a gap between the availability of feedback and the expectations of the students in these respects. This conclusion is confirmed by Ma (2018) and Alhojailan (2021) who strongly advocate the need for more efforts to provide contructive feedback to meet postgraduate students' needs and expectations in academic writing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study illuminated writing perceptions presented by postgraduate students within the context of a Turkish university. The issues related to the use of norms and conventions in academic writing postgraduate programs were explored. The results may provide beneficial implications for postgraduate students, supervisors, faculty members, and course designers who seek for solutions to postgraduate students' writing problems and difficulties. No one can deny that the postgraduate programs and the faculties expect high quality theses and dissertations from the postgraduate students. In this respect, the results can increase students' awareness about the demands of their faculties and enable the novice writers to analyze their own writing and discover their writing skills and inadequacies.

Another important implication of this study can be that writing courses in postgraduate programs should involve

practices for students correct, specific, and subtle conventions of writing not only in general but also in their own fields or disciplines. When doing this, students' conceptions should be incorporated into the courses as well as the guidance of faculty members. In writing courses, the students should be offered various practice opportunities and provided a content to improve their understanding of academic writing conventions through the meaningful exposure to the accurate use of these conventions.

Limitations and Further Research

One of the limitations in this study is the sample size. For more comprehensive and generalizable results, further research is needed with more participants. In addition, the evaluation of students' writing development focused on only one text before and after the instruction. Keeping in mind that this situation may not clearly represent the students' writing skills, future studies which analyze a variety of texts are recommended. Also, this study adopted a qualitative design based on the interviews with the participants, the findings may not be generalized in other contexts; therefore, a mixed-methods design can provide more generalizable results.

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