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Abstract

Academic writing is a salient skill for medical students all over the world. Academic writing starts with composing effective paragraphs, laying the foundation for students' advancement in writing during college. This study investigated common mistakes in English paragraph writing committed by the first-year medical students of the Medicine Faculty at Kabul University of Medical Sciences. Additionally, it measured the challenges that Medicine Faculty students tackled in paragraph writing. This quantitative study was conducted through an action research design. The data were collected from 52 medical students, and their work was analyzed using the developed rubrics. The data were analyzed in the SPPS 26 version, and the descriptive statistics were reported. The findings revealed that participants obtained the highest means in the mechanics of paragraph writing (22 out of 25), and they received the lowest means (12 out of 25) in the contents of a paragraph. In English for Medical Purposes (EMP), students should improve their content finding, paragraphing, summarizing, and referencing skills for their assignments and research writings. Medical students should give detailed attention to every characteristic of academic paragraph writing because they give readers a full grasp of the contents of their written works.

Introduction

Academic writing skills pave the way for native and non-native speakers to spread knowledge and their ideas worldwide. It is essential for college students as a skill that assists them in reporting their ideas. Writing is one of the most conducive skills for 21st-century learners. Pragmatic writing knowledge paves the ground for learners to publish articles, book reviews, and essays in reputed journals. The insights and skills of paragraph writing, paragraph elements, and paragraph attributes are essential for college learners. Aulia and Bram (2020) stated that writing is a means of communication and facilitates learning English, so teachers should give enough attention to this language skill. However, some factors make academic

writing composition difficult for non-native speakers. English as a foreign language learners face academic writing problems such as paragraph organization, content, mechanics, referencing, and syntax during college. Some teachers who teach English in an EFL context neglect teaching writing skills due to their complications. Furthermore, the lack of feedback is another problem that deters students from writing paragraphs, essays, and reports effectively in English.

Sometimes, identifying errors and providing feedback positively affect students' paragraph writing. This scientific study analyzed common mistakes in English paragraph writing committed by first-year medical students of the Medicine Faculty at Kabul University of Medical Sciences. According to Al-Ghabra and Najim (2019), error identification assists teachers in finding new teaching strategies. For instance, it helps teachers provide direct and indirect feedback on time. Some common errors include grammatical, punctuation, coherence, capitalization, and formatting errors (Al-Ghabra & Najim, 2019). This study measures the level of difficulties in academic writing. The objectives considered include analyzing typical mistakes in paragraph writing in English for medical purposes, identifying common mistake levels in five major categories of mistakes in the rubric, and investigating the challenges Medicine Faculty students face in paragraph writing. In this study, the following research questions were asked:

1. What are the typical academic writing mistakes Medicine Faculty students commit in their paragraph writing assignments?
2. What are the most common challenges students experience when writing paragraphs?

Literature Review

Academic writing skills are essential for medical students. Medical students perform many projects for different courses during college to help them learn effective writing skills. Academic writing helps medical students to share research findings and cases with audiences. Researchers believe constructive feedback promotes students' academic writing skills. Medical students enhance their writing skills by identifying common mistakes in their paragraphs. Teachers who teach English for Medical Purposes courses should analyze their students' paragraph writing strengths and weaknesses. This strategy allows the teachers to understand the paragraph writing challenges of medical students and offers a more practical way of overcoming them. Al-Ghabra and Najim (2019) mentioned that writing is challenging for non-native

speakers, especially those studying English in developing countries. In developing countries, students only study a few subjects in English at school, so it remains problematic when they enroll in college.

Dan, Duc, and Hong-Chau (2017) opined that paragraph writing is the basic unit of academic writing and established that there are two significant sources of mistakes in non-native speaker writing: native language interruption and target language interruption. Spelling, tenses, formatting, capitalization, and wording are everyday things that could be improved. Al-Ghabra and Najim (2019) noted some common types of errors: grammatical errors, punctuation errors, coherence errors, capitalization errors, and formatting errors. Some teachers need to provide feedback or correct students' significant errors, which increases students' writing errors. Paragraph writing is vital but challenging for students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting during college. Generally, teachers do not correct students' errors because of their busy schedules. Besides, most teachers need help with a rubric for measuring students' writing performance.

Realizing the elements of paragraph writing and putting them into a sequence is essential to medical students. Al-Naibi, Al-Jabri, and Al-Kalbani (2018) stated that students worked on organizing a paragraph and sentence structure using various tools. The authors stated that English language teachers utilized various tools to promote students' writing skills and consider writing essential tasks for students. Similarly, according to Al-Ghabra and Najim (2019), error identification assists teachers in determining new teaching strategies. Furthermore, writing is essential for the promotion of the educational system. Generally, identifying errors and providing feedback positively improves the students' academic writing performance.

In short, Aulia and Bram (2020) stated that writing is a type of written communication that is pivotal in the EFL learning process. Writing skills are acquired through perseverance and practice inside and beyond the classroom. Both the writing process and linguistics knowledge promote students' academic writing. Errors and mistakes are common. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students must practice writing paragraphs without Burden. Aulia and Bram (2020) mentioned that non-native English speakers must often correct their academic writing.

Method and Materials

This study was conducted using the descriptive quantitative research method. Furthermore, Action Research Design procedures were utilized throughout the research process. An action research design is a sub-type of quantitative research method, and it is used in social sciences. The research design was used by researchers who faced challenges when teaching writing to medical students, and they strived to overcome the challenges in the future. The researchers investigated the students' common mistakes with the help of a standard rubric. The rubric was adapted from (Hogue, 1996). The rubric has five major categories of academic writing mistakes in English committed by non-native writers. It includes organization, mechanics, sentence structures, referencing, and format. (See Appendix 1).

Study Setting and Procedure

This scientific research was performed in the Department of English at Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Kabul, Afghanistan, to help the English for Specific Purposes course lecturers promote students' academic writing skills. Academic paragraph writing was taught to students during the first semester of their first year. They studied academic paragraph writing skills and wrote academic paragraphs at the end of the lesson as an assignment. The teacher explained paragraph writing over a short period. In general, the students were assigned to write one paragraph that contained eight lines. The adapted rubric was shared with Medicine Faculty students throughout the writing project (assignment).

Materials and Data Collection Tools

This research material consists of fifty-two paragraphs and the teacher's feedback, which was reviewed according to the rubric (Checklist). Moreover, the researchers reviewed, evaluated, and synthesized the targeted articles for literature review based on the keywords (Paragraph, Adult, and English for Specific Purposes, Mistakes, Correction, and Assessment) published between 2010 and 2021. In addition to reviewing students' paragraphs, some in-depth literature reviews were conducted to justify the problems and research topic. Paragraph samples and literature reviews were applied as primary tools for this study. The investigators collected samples from students who received general lessons about paragraph writing. Before collecting

samples, the researchers received informed consent from the participants and shared the study's aims with the students.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

The number of participants depended on information saturation. In this study, the homework from fifty-two medical students was randomly selected from 220 male and female students. Fifty-two students' homework related to paragraph writing was analyzed. The random sampling strategy was utilized in this study, and the sample size was assembled from the first year of the Medicine Faculty (12 groups, 220 male and female students). There were 120 male and 100 female students in the first year. English for Medical Purposes teachers taught paragraph writing skills to students during the first semester. The lectures included paragraph writing process, paragraph organization, sentence types according to structure and meaning, reviewing, and editing.

Data Analysis

The data, derived from a Likert scale based on a rubric, were analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 and an Excel program. The researchers coded and analyzed the sample using previously developed questionnaires and integrated themes. The investigators evaluated and synthesized the common mistakes in the written paragraphs.

Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion Criteria

This study includes participants from the medical faculty who studied English for specific purposes in the Department of English at Kabul University of Medical Sciences. The first-semester students were included in this study. The study utilized articles published between 2015 and 2021. These articles were evaluated, analyzed, synthesized, and reported. It excluded articles not published in international journals.

Results

This study explored two research questions to measure the level of attributes in medical students' paragraph writing in English. Both questions were answered through descriptive statistics. Frequency, means, and standard deviation were reported in the tables. The first research question investigated the common paragraph writing challenges that the Medicine Faculty students confronted during their written project. Findings were received from 52

participants, male (54%) and female (46%), who participated and contributed their written paragraphs.

Figure 1

This is the chart from 52 participants.

Male and Female

46%   54%

Male
Female

.
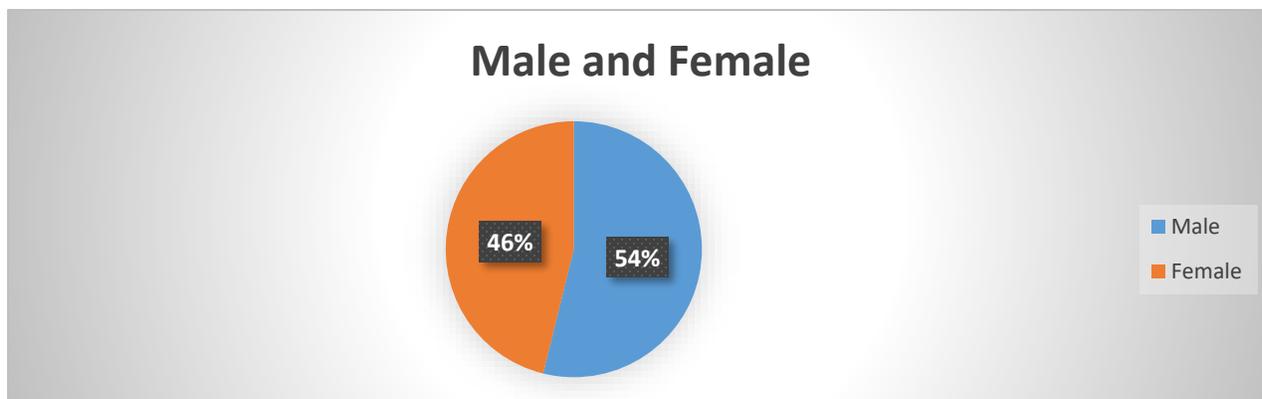
Note: Primary Source

The first research question about typical writing mistakes students make is explained in Table 1. The students' common mistakes were assessed through a rubric and included five major categories. Each category of mistake included five statements, and they contained five items (very good, good, satisfactory, need, improvement, and fail). The scores are classified from very good to fail with a range of Very Good (25-21), Good (20-16), Satisfactory (15-11), Need Improvement (10-6), and Fail (5-1).

Table 1

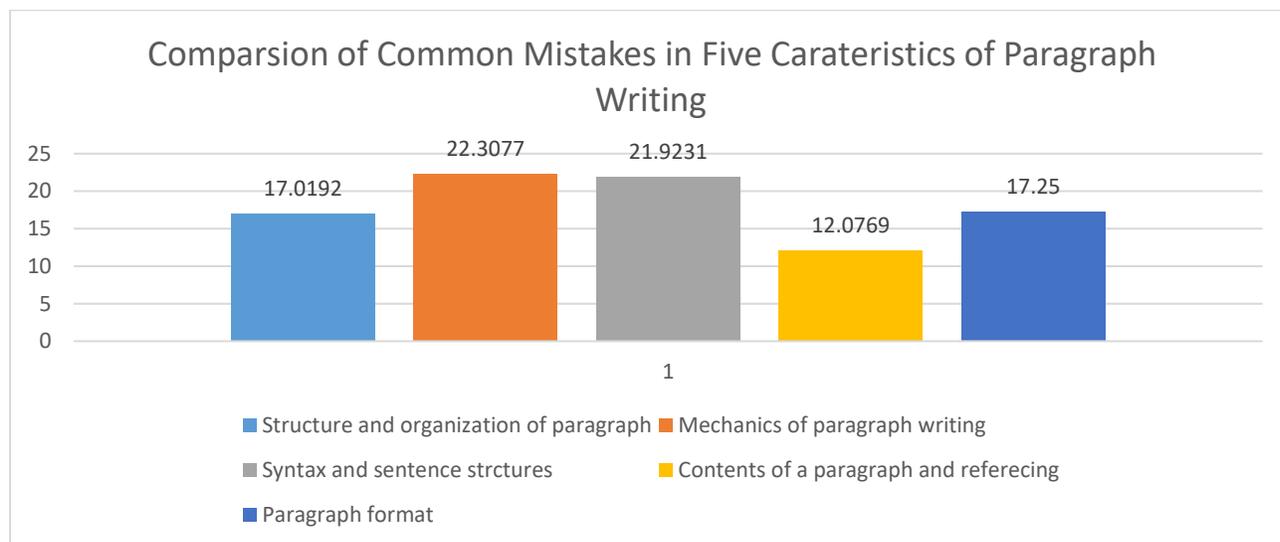*Descriptive Analysis for Participants' Paragraphs*

T-Test

Statistics

No	Five Major Categories of Mistakes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1	Structure and organization of paragraph	52	17.0192	4.46112	.61865
2	Mechanics of paragraph writing	52	22.3077	3.63285	.50379
3	Syntax and sentence structures	52	21.9231	4.11047	.57002
4	Contents of a paragraph and referencing	52	12.0769	2.18593	.30313
5	Paragraph format	52	17.2500	4.96211	.68812

Note: Primary Source

In Figure 2, readers can easily compare five significant categories of mistakes committed by medical students in English for Medical Purposes courses. The score classification is stated as Very Good (25-21), Good (20-16), Satisfactory (15-11), Need Improvement (10-6), and Fail (5-1). The first category, Structure and Organization of Paragraphs, has a means of (17) in the T-test. This category received an excellent score according to the scoring categorization. The mechanics of paragraph writing is the second category of mistakes, with a means score of (22) which is very good. The third category is syntax and sentence structures; in this part, research obtained a means score of (21), which is very good. The contents of a paragraph are the fourth category of common mistakes. It has the lowest score of all categories (12), and the contents of a paragraph fall under the category of need improvement. The final category is in paragraph format; references have a means of (17) and are in a suitable category. In sum, the mechanics of paragraph writing category has the highest mean score, and the contents of a paragraph have the lowest mean scores in the descriptive statistics.

Figure 2

Descriptive Analysis for Participants

Comparsion of Common Mistakes in Five Carateristics of Paragraph Writing

- Structure and organization of paragraph: 17.0192
- Mechanics of paragraph writing: 22.3077
- Syntax and sentence strctures: 21.9231
- Contents of a paragraph and referecing: 12.0769
- Paragraph format: 17.25

Note: Primary Source

The second research question dealt with the most considered characteristics of an academic paragraph by medical students. The medicine faculty students used appropriate commas, periods, and question marks (paragraph mechanics characteristics). The mechanics of paragraph writing were considered more than the other four attributes of academic paragraph writing. The content of a paragraph and referencing were considered less by students who study English for medical purposes at Kabul University of Medical Sciences, as shown in Figure 2. Nuruzzaman, Shafiq Islam, and Shuchi (2018) reported that paragraph organization, sentence structure, content, mechanics, and vocabulary are essential for paragraph writing in English. English as a foreign language students improve their writing through pragmatic practice and committing errors. Langdon-Neuner and Berghammer (2014) reported that knowledge of English grammar is essential for medical writers. Similarly, Koushik (2015) revealed that medical students must develop sound writing skills and good sentence structure.

According to Nuruzzaman, Shafiq Islam, and Shuchi (2018), grammatical errors are typical in EFL students' paragraph writing in English. By the same token, Koushik (2015) said medical writing simplifies complex ideas understandably. Medical writers need pragmatic

knowledge of structuring contents and must have a good amount of vocabulary and understanding of writing skills. In summary, grammar, paragraph organization, content knowledge, and mechanics are among the characteristics of paragraph writing skills in English. These are the accepted attributes of the academic paragraph that have been reported in much research.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis for Participants' Paragraphs

Note: Primary Source

No	25 Statements under the five major categories	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
T-Test Statistics					
Structure and organization of paragraph					
1	The paragraph has a topic sentence.	52	4.3654	1.12073	.15542
2	The paragraph has major supporting sentences (reasons & facts).	52	3.4038	1.12476	.15598
3	The paragraph has minor supporting sentences.	52	3.4038	1.10719	.15354
4	The paragraph has a concluding sentence.	52	3.4615	1.55250	.21529
5	The paragraph writer utilizes transitional words.	52	2.3846	1.28573	.17830
Mechanics of paragraph writing					
6	The paragraph writer uses full stops appropriately.	52	4.7115	1.01627	.14093
7	The paragraph writer considers capitalization rules.	52	3.8654	1.50852	.20919
8	The paragraph writer considers punctuation rules (colon, comma, semicolon).	52	4.4423	1.19498	.16571
9	The paragraph writer considers spelling.	52	4.5577	1.03684	.14378
10	The paragraph writer uses English tenses appropriately.	52	4.7308	.71717	.09945
Syntax and sentence structures					
11	The writer uses various types of sentences.	52	4.5000	1.11144	.15413
12	The sentences have Subject-verb agreement.	52	4.5962	.95506	.13244
13	The writer does not use Run-on sentences.	52	3.9615	1.31300	.18208
14	The writer does not use Commas splices.	52	4.2115	1.34801	.18693
15	The writer does not use Fragment.	52	4.6538	.71083	.09857
Contents of a paragraph and referencing					

Discussion

Academic writing is difficult for native and non-native speakers due to some limitations. The findings depicted that there are some common mistakes medical students encounter. When writers consider the English language's paragraph writing process and linguistics components,

they cannot produce an effective academic paragraph. This skill is neglected in the EFL context due to time limitations and a shortage of classroom equipment.

The paragraphs were analyzed using the attributes of effective paragraphs. These attributes are categorized into five general categories, each containing five minor points. The general category of rubrics includes paragraph organization, mechanics of paragraph writing, sentence structures, contents, and format, whereas the five minor sub-points of the general category were stated in (Appendix 1). The students' assignments were reviewed carefully, and their works were compared with the given characteristics of an effective paragraph. The descriptive statistics showed (Table 1 & 2, Figure 1) medical students' strong and weak points in English paragraph writing. Students performed very well in the mechanics section of the rubric. It means their paragraph has limited mechanics that could be improved. They used period, comma, and question marks appropriately in their paragraphs. English for Medical Purposes (EMP) teachers concentrate on another characteristic of paragraphs instead of mechanics. Students need more information about basic punctuation marks (period, comma, and question mark) and capitalization rules during school, so explaining the advanced mechanics rules for EMP students is mandatory. Teachers should assign students to perform peer reviews and self-reviews of some paragraphs written by their classroom in EMP class. Donesch-Jezo (2014) also mentioned that English for Medical Purposes is a compulsory subject in many universities, and this course assists learners in increasing their English major skills through specific materials, activities, and teaching strategies.

In addition, the students needed to correct the contents and characteristics of paragraphs. According to descriptive statistics (Figure 1), the contents section of the paragraph came under the category of needing improvement. This indicates that medical students experience difficulties in finding knowledgeable content for their writing assignments. Furthermore, they paraphrase and summarize the content without changing the idea of the original content. Medical students should use in-text and end-text citations in their paragraphs to prevent plagiarism. Students often copy a portion of the text without crediting the author. Finding interesting content that fits the level of the reader and the field of study is crucial for the medical student. The library and Google Search assist students in finding resources for writing their projects. Rawson et al. (2010)

mentioned that students and workers must search for good medical content to become successful medical writers.

Paragraph organization and paragraph format are the other qualities of a good paragraph. The students' assignments were in the good category of the used rubric. Developing organization assists students in composing clear and correct paragraphs for readers. It improves through effort and asking teachers for constructive feedback. The paragraph organization (topic sentence, supporting sentence, and concluding sentence) must be fixed. It was found that the students utilized a general topic sentence, which is difficult to explain within one paragraph. The students' paragraphs need coherence and unity. Medical students need practical skills to overcome a lack of coherence and unity in their academic writing. Also, appropriately using transitions and conjunctions can be beneficial in overcoming these mistakes. Teachers should teach syntax and word choice techniques to educate good writers. Koushik (2015) revealed that medical writers simplify complex ideas. They must practice using various sentences that bring flow to the text and coherent ideas within a paragraph.

Sentence structure is one of the most essential attributes of paragraph writing in English. The findings demonstrated that students performed very well in syntax and sentence structure because they studied grammar with enough attention. In addition, English for medical purposes, teachers explained the grammar lessons and that they are interested in syntax and sentence structure. It was inferred from students' sentence structure usage in homework, and they utilized various types of sentences in their homework.

Conclusion

All in all, the scientific study analyzed the written project works of first-year medical students who study at Kabul University of Medical Sciences. The findings revealed the students' positive and negative skills in writing. The descriptive statistics findings showed that the students had three types of performance in five English paragraph writing characteristics. They had outstanding scores in paragraph mechanics and syntax. The medical students received good scores in paragraph format and organization. Finally, they received less or needed improvement scores in the content sections. The researcher recommends that educational research in Afghanistan be conducted in English for specific purposes, especially in English for medical

purposes across public and private institutions. English for specific purposes (ESP) is new for college students and teachers. Researchers can perform qualitative and quantitative research approaches in the ESP context and discuss assessment strategies for listening and grammatical issues. The findings of this study help teachers and medical students who study English for Medical Purposes subjects during college to write well-structured and clear academic paragraphs.

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Appendix

Data Collection Tool: Analytical Rubric or Questionnaire for Students

Writer Name: -------------------------------- **Gender:** --------------------- **Faculty:** --------------------

Instruction: This questionnaire is part of academic advancement at the KUMS education system. Participants' paragraph samples help the researcher investigate the Curative students' academic paragraph writing challenges and develop solutions that accelerate medical writing in English.

5= Very good   4= Good   3 = satisfactory   2 = Need improvement   1= Fail

A. Structure and organization of paragraph:

1. ------ The paragraph has a topic sentence.
2. ------ The paragraph has major supporting sentences (reasons & facts).
3. ------ The paragraph has minor supporting sentences.
4. ------ The paragraph has a concluding sentence.
5. ------ The paragraph writer utilizes transitional words.

B. Mechanics of paragraph writing:

1. ------ The paragraph writer uses full stop appropriately.
2. ------ The paragraph writer considers capitalization rules.
3. ------ The paragraph writer considers punctuation rules (colon, comma, semicolon).
4. ------ The paragraph writer considers spelling.
5. ------ The paragraph writer uses English tenses appropriately.

C. Syntax and sentence structures

1. ------ The writer uses various types of sentences.
2. ------ The sentences have Subject-verb agreement.
3. ------ The writer does not use Run-on sentences.
4. ------ The writer does not use Commas splices.
5. ------ The writer does not use Fragment.

D. Contents of a paragraph and referencing

1. ------ The paragraph is plagiarism-free.
2. ------ The paragraph has in-text citations.
3. ------ The paragraph has end-text citation.
4. ------ The paragraph has coherence.
5. ------ The writer chooses the right words.

E. Paragraph Format

1. ------ The paragraph has an Indentation.
2. ------ The writer justifies the paragraph.
3.   ------ The Font size is as stated in the rubric.
4. ------ The paragraph contains at least eight lines.
5. ------ The paragraph writer considers Spacing between lines.

Adapted from "Hogue, A. (1996). *First Steps in Academic Writing.* New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc."