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# Russian University EFL Students' Perceptions of a Two-Week Online Academic Writing Course

Nataliia Borozdina

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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Russian University EFL Students' Perceptions of a Two-Week Online Academic Writing Course

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

by

Nataliia Borozdina  
Kursk State University  
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2014

May 2019  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Kristina Howlett, Ph.D.  
Thesis Chair

---

Christopher Kelley, J.D.  
Committee Member

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Freddie Bowles, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

## Abstract

This case study analyzes Russian university EFL students' perceptions of a two-week online academic writing course. The researcher investigated 13 students' attitudes towards an online academic English writing class offered at Kursk State University, Kursk's oldest higher education institution, founded in 1934. In 1994 it was transformed into Kursk State Pedagogical University, and in 2003 it became Kursk State University. Along with the two-week online course assignments, the students completed pre- and post-questionnaires, reflections about the course, and participated in individual and group interviews. The findings of the study indicate that all of the participants had positive perceptions about the suggested course, considered it beneficial for their future, and would like to continue learning about academic English writing and expand their experiences with online classes.

Keywords: Russian EFL Students, Online Education, Academic English Writing, Adult Education, Students' Perceptions.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Russian students who major in English at the college level face many challenges when asked to write in English because they are not taught how to write academically in high school or college. Also, many Russian professors who teach English find teaching writing time-consuming and complicated. Moreover, the majority of Russian professors have never taken any academic writing courses themselves as those courses are still difficult to find (Abramova et al., 2013). Since academic English writing skills are one of the major ways to access learning in English-speaking-countries, Russian students are at a disadvantage because a non-English-speaking country such as Russia is unlikely to have academic writing courses in English as part of the university curriculum.

For example, Bowen et al. (2006) examined the state of resume writing in Russia. The research showed that not only courses such as resume writing were unavailable in Russian universities, but also the whole approach to writing was seen differently. Instead of writing exams, oral assessments were a common procedure used on the exams throughout the semester. Even at the Russian linguistics departments, students' writing is usually limited to short compositions and translations. None of these writing assignments can be considered research or academic writing. Furthermore, the study reported that among 21 courses in the curriculum of the English Department at the Herzen State Pedagogical University located in Saint Petersburg, Russia, none were devoted to writing.

However, the necessity for such courses arises not only from the challenges Russian professors and students meet regarding academic writing in English, but also from the standards that have to be implemented since Russia became a full member of the Bologna Process in 2003,

which established agreements between European countries to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualifications. Becoming a member of the Bologna Process also means sharing common key values of the organization, which are freedom of expression, autonomy for institutions, independent student unions, academic freedom, and free movement of students. When Russia joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), English should have become widely taught at the Russian universities because academic writing skills in English are essential for Russian students to express themselves in European university settings, where they have a chance to study because of the creation of the joint educational space. Yet, none of the Russian standards mention academic writing skills in English or courses in any language other than Russian. Some major Russian federal universities mostly located in Moscow and Saint Petersburg offer such courses, but these courses are an exception rather than the norm (Butler, 2014). Thus, Russian university students typically lack academic writing skills in English and it is especially obvious when it comes to writing research papers and dissertations in English.

## **Background**

Since Russia became a member of the Bologna Process in 2003, Russian university students have the opportunity to continue their education in European countries that have also signed the Bologna Declaration. Created in 1999, the Bologna Declaration united European educational space to harmonize and to unite higher education in Europe. Apart from creating the possibility for students to study abroad, Russia's membership in the Bologna Declaration was a strategic movement for Russian higher education. At the end of the Soviet era (1991), Russia had lost its position on the educational market to recruit students because the countries that formed the Soviet Union became independent, and it became difficult for potential students from the



former Soviet Union countries to study in Russia due to new territory borders. After the Soviet Union's disintegration in 1991, the number of international students matriculated in Russia universities significantly decreased because the ease of student mobility was lost. The ease of mobility was achieved through special political relations among the Soviet Union countries. Furthermore, keen competition among the U.S. and western European universities has left only a few Russian universities ranked among the world's best universities (Кастыева-Жан, 2007).

A nation that is a member of the Bologna Process must satisfy the Bologna Process's standards, including conforming its degrees to those standards. To conform to the Bologna process, Russia changed its universities' degrees and the respective timeframe for their completion. Russia substituted the "specialist" degree, which required five years to complete and was a prerequisite for a Ph.D. Bachelor's degrees require four to five years to complete. Master's degrees require one to two years to complete. Both are prerequisites for a Ph.D. degree. One of the main issues connected with these changes was a lack of accountability in the area of curriculum. The changes remained primarily on paper, and the curriculum used in the higher educational institutions in Russia has not significantly changed. However, Salnikov and Buruknin (2009) claim that reforms in the educational system bring benefits "only by overcoming its own state of crisis, by transforming the content, forms, and methods of its organization, by creating a fundamentally new technological format of the teaching and learning process" (p. 89). But the reason for preserving Russia's curriculum may have been Russia's desire to keep its sovereignty and independence from other European countries (Kaplan, 2007). Another reason might be the way the Russian educational system works as a whole. From 2004 until 2018, Russian education was managed by the Ministry of Education and Science, which controlled all educational institutions and reforms at all educational levels in Russia. In 2018, the

Ministry of Education and Science was separated into two Ministries: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Now, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education controls scientific institutions, university-level education, and their curricular in Russia. Having a centralized control system over higher education means that curriculum change is slow and rare at Russian universities.

Despite the slow pace of change in Russian higher education, new educational standards were introduced in 2010. According to the new standards, universities gained the right to select half of their courses and curricula. They also were required to offer optional courses in every educational program. In addition, new educational standards allowed students the option of independent study for up to 50 percent of a student's learning time (Nikolaev & Chugunov, 2012). However, "many universities have shown themselves incapable of carrying out internal reforms" because the government "does not encourage any external influence over curriculum and training matters" (Nikolaev & Chugunov, 2012, p. 69).

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This study's purpose was to analyze Russian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' perceptions about an extracurricular two-week online course on academic English writing. The participants of the study are a group of second-year students from the foreign languages department at Kursk State University in Kursk, Russia. According to Bartkus et. al (2012) "extracurricular activities encompass non-compulsory activities that take place at school but are not included in the curriculum" (p. 55). Furthermore, Coskun (2016) emphasizes the relevance of extracurricular activities for English language learners. According to Coskun, English proficiency and extracurricular activities are connected with each other, especially when students lack natural language learning opportunities outside of the classroom.

This study intends to examine if the availability of an extracurricular online academic English writing course will be appreciated by Russian EFL students. The hypothesis of the study is that such courses are beneficial for developing students' academic skills and are needed in the university curricular. This study is important because it will analyze other relevant skills related to the use of technology in education, while not interfering with the university curriculum, as well as the teacher's perceptions on embedding the two-week writing module.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed are:

- What are the students' perceptions towards an online academic English writing course before and after?
- How will students' attitudes towards an online academic English writing course change by the end of the study?
- What are the teacher's perceptions of teaching a two-week online academic English writing module?

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Defining Academic Writing**

Academic writing is defined as “any writing done to fulfill a requirement of a college or university.” Academic writing assignments might include book reports, essays, research papers or articles, conference papers, dissertations and theses. According to Listyani (2018), writing is a complex activity and requires not only mechanical skills, but also cognitive skills. “Learning to write is not a question of developing a set of mechanical skills: it also involves learning a new set of cognitive and social relations” (Listyani, 2018, p. 173). Good academic writing requires students to master many skills such as learning how to grammatically structure a sentence, using appropriate vocabulary, coherence, style. Most importantly, it requires “a complete, active, struggling engagement” (Singh, 2015, p. 13).

When students face an academic environment for the first time they have to socialize academically, which means to adopt to “new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting, and organizing knowledge” (Ofte, 2014, p. 32). Thus, students face challenges when they are asked to produce an academic writing. Moreover, writing in a non-native language is more difficult than writing in a native language. Writing in a second or foreign language is complex and demands from students a special set of skills that they do not acquire when they learn how to write in their native language. Writing academically in another language requiring an understanding of the social relations and the culture of the language students write in. Thus, teachers should understand that there are many differences between writing in L1 (first language) and L2 (second language), and “the targeted academic writing skills require structured training programs as they cannot be otherwise osmotically acquired” (Aluas, 2017, p. 1997).

## **Types of Academic Writing**

According to Luas et al. (2017), European research universities are facing a decline in students' writing and publishing skills in the English language. Moreover, the demand for research publications has never been so high. According to the authors, these facts also support the idea that university students need writing training programs to target academic writing skills required for competent academic writing.

There are different types of academic writing. Academic writing can be general and specific. General academic writing includes style, text structure, perspective, reading flow, argumentation, text types, and sequence (Luas et al., 2017) Specific academic writing includes all the features general academic writing includes, but these features vary according to the purpose academic writing is used for. In this study the focus was on general academic writing in order to create an image of what academic English writing is in general.

Since English has become a widely used international language, the importance of academic writing in English has become an international need, which should be addressed at all higher education institutions (Matsuda, 2003). For example, Singh (2015) analyses the challenges, non-native English-speaking, international graduate students in Malaysia face in their academic writing. Although the students successfully pass exams such as the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which are qualifying exams for studying at an English-speaking university, the students are still unable to produce good academic papers and to grasp new academic writing expectations and norms. The majority of international students who study in Malaysia reported difficulties with grammar, syntax, and lexis. Beyond these issues, the situation worsens when the students face challenges such as expressing and organizing ideas, writing supporting arguments, or

defending claims. Thus, besides a limited general proficiency in English, international students lack social knowledge and critical thinking specific to native English speakers. Overall, the study showed that international graduate students were lacking the correct understanding of the English academic culture, and they were relying on their native language beliefs, assumptions, and approaches when writing research papers.

These findings also support the idea developed by Arkoudis and Tran (2007) that considering academic writing as a form of thinking is essential for the success of international students. Aberg et al. (2016) also pointed out the importance of adopting cultural, linguistic, and social patterns of the foreign- or second-language students write in. Such patterns are tightly connected with students' metacognitive skills such as critical thinking and abstract reflection. However, research shows that many students see academic writing only as a skill-based improvement of their English in general rather than a development of metacognitive skills (Ofte, 2014). Furthermore, it is important to consider that developing academic literacy is not a linear process. The author also states that academic writing cannot be seen as going from point A to point B as usually a multiple number of drafts that revise and restructure the first draft are required before the final work is complete (Ofte, 2014).

### **The Use of Formative Assessment**

In this study, the students who participated in the course were volunteers, and they did not receive grades for their work. The study's purpose was to investigate students' perceptions of the course. Thus, among all types of assessment the teachers can use, the formative type of assessment seemed the most appropriate for this study. Much contemporary research and literature focuses on the benefits of formative types of writing assessment. Formative assessment is student-oriented and promotes students' learning (Gikandi et al., 2011). As stated by Fernando

(2017), “in contrast to summative assessment, which is focused on achievement and seeks to establish whether students ‘have reached a particular standard’, formative assessment is designed to support the learning process by guiding students towards the intended learning goal” (p. 4). Herrera et al. (2013) defines formative assessment as the “tools and strategies employed by grade-level and other teachers to determine what and how their students are learning so that instruction can be modified accordingly while it is still in progress” (p. 185). Another reason why formative assessment was chosen for this study is that careful planning of lessons is important to online coursework. For example, Palloff et al. (2013) states that proper and special lesson and course planning in general are important in online education, and teachers often make a mistake when they consider that converting a traditional face-to-face class into an online class will be successful. Instead, considering that the course has never been taught before will be more beneficial and help eliminate methods that will not work online. Furthermore, the authors recommend questions that instructors may consider when creating an online course. Some of these questions are:

- “1. Who are my students?
2. Is this a course that will successfully transfer to the online environment?
3. How will I address attendance requirements?
4. What guidelines, rules, roles, and norms need to be established?
5. How do I define learning in this content area, and what do I want to see as the learning outcomes?” (p. 88).

There are two types of formative assessment that teachers might use in their practice: informal and formal formative assessment. Informal formative assessment includes inquiry assessment, observation assessment, structured authentic assessment, teacher-made tests, point-

in-time assessment, curriculum-based measurement, self-assessment, and technology-based assessment. For example, inquiry assessment can be achieved through simple dialogs with the students. Teacher observations during the instruction can also provide valuable information about the students' difficulties or strengths. Structured authentic assessment can be achieved if teachers let their students work in heterogeneous pairs (their native language and English) to complete a required task. Pop-up quizzes and short tests can be an example of point-in-time assessment (Herrera et al., 2013).

Liu (2013) examined characteristics of formative assessment and what benefits arise from its use in education. One of the main characteristics of formative assessment is that it directly relates to instruction that is still in process. This allows instructors to find and eliminate problems in their teaching while the instruction is incomplete. Another characteristic of formative assessment aims at supporting students' progress by allowing teachers to carefully plan their lessons. When teachers monitor their students' progress while instruction is still in progress, they know better how to maintain their students' interest and motivation.

### **Formative Assessment and Language Learning**

Brookhart (2013) examined different students' and teachers' mind-sets that can promote or push back students' success in learning. Some students think that intelligence is fixed while others believe that learning shapes intelligence. The first group of students need teachers' special attention as these students are less motivated to learn. Teachers can also be divided according to the strategies they prioritize in their teaching. Instructors with the teacher-centered mind-set tend to emphasize summative assessment and pay little or no attention to the process of students' learning. In contrast, teachers with the student-centered mind-sets focus on the process rather



than bare educational standards. These teachers try to reach “inside the kids’ heads” (Bookhart, 2013, p. 22) and make every part of their teaching meaningful to students.

A sphere of education where formative assessment is one of the most effective strategies is language learning. When students learn a new language, English in particular, they learn to listen, speak, read, and write simultaneously. However, not all parts of language learning are equally emphasized in educational curriculars. Writing has become an important skill in education, but students report that this is one of the skills they struggle with the most (Zotzmann, 2013). Several studies have investigated how teachers and students perceive writing. Rushidi (2012) claims that the complexity of writing increases students’ anxiety, and they try to avoid writing assignments if they are not necessary for the course.

Furthermore, many teachers consider writing a complicated and time-consuming process to teach. Besides, some universities do not have any writing courses in their curricular. In Russia, writing does not play such a significant role in education. The functions of writing are limited to small assignments and do not influence university students’ grades as much as oral performances. University teachers also claim that they do not teach writing because students are not required to write research papers in English (Bowen et al., 2006). At the same time, the survey responses collected by Butler et al. (2014) showed that “writing well in English is considered very important by Russian university students and teachers – for their career and profession” (p. 225). The study also supported the fact that Russian educational standards do not include the development of writing skills in any language, and students encounter difficulties when they face a writing exercise incorporated into other activities.

Thus, challenges students face when they are assigned writing tasks emphasize the need for writing courses, especially in higher education. For example, Graham et al. (2015) examined

a reform proposed by the National Commission on Writing (NCoW) in 2003. NCoW released a report titled *The Neglected “R”: The Need for a Writing Revolution* (NCoW, 2003). The report emphasized the need to teach U.S. students writing because they received little or no instruction. The study conducted by Abramova et al. (2013) analyzed the need for writing courses as their absence in the curricular “make our young people incapable of effective learning abroad” (p. 100). Furthermore, Graham et al. (2015) analyzed the impact of different types of feedback used in formative assessment. The analysis showed that feedback from adults had the largest effect on students’ learning. Self-feedback, peer-feedback, and computer feedback had less effect on students’ learning but still were defined as useful strategies.

Another study conducted in Norway investigated the effects of formative assessments on students’ learning and teachers’ perceptions towards this type of assessment. The study showed that formative assessment had a positive effect in reaching educational goals (Burner, 2016). The author further investigated the impact of formative assessment on writing and concluded that “students appreciate frequent writing practice, constructive teacher feedback and text revision” (p. 641).

Poe (2014) defined writing assessment as “(1) designing a series of strategies to increase our knowledge of a complex context – that is, writing; (2) making meaningful discussions based on our measurement of that construct; and (3) understanding the effects of our practices on students and on ourselves” (p. 271). Thus, Poe (2014) not only stressed the importance of formative writing assessment for students, but also its positive effect for teachers as it helps improve their teaching strategies. Supporting these findings, Beck et al. (2018) explored what strategies teachers prioritize when responding to individual students’ challenges in writing. Despite the teachers’ preference of product-focused assessment, they claimed that they did not

use the same strategies for teaching writing for all students. The results of this study support the importance of formative assessment in teaching as it allows teachers to make changes while instruction is still in progress to achieve better learning outcomes.

### **Formative Assessments in Online Courses**

The use of formative assessment and the strategies it offers to educators is not only limited to traditional classrooms. The expansion of online education created the need to develop new assessment strategies that allow teachers to scaffold their students' learning without physically being in one classroom. Wilson et al. (2017) analyzed the use of computational natural language processing assessment tools within the levels of language framework, a cognitive writing theory. According to the levels-of-language framework, the process of writing is presented by word-level writing skills, sentence level-writing skills, and discourse-level writing skills. At each level, formative assessment helps instructors identify challenges and address them through intervention. However, Wilson et al. (2017) emphasized the idea that positive effects of formative assessment are directly dependent on the particular strategies teachers use. Since a human factor is involved, it is not always possible for teachers to provide objective feedback to their students. The study showed that a supplementary use of NLP (Natural Language Processing) tools has a positive effect on students' learning as it allows "(a) to provide valid and nuanced information about distinct writing skills that are meaningfully related to outcomes of interest, and (b) to support educators in providing meaningful and effective feedback" (p. 31). One of the types of formative assessment used in this study was students' reflections. Using students' reflections in an online writing course could help educators develop students' critical skills and what students learned better in the course and adjust for their future learning (Siles-Gonzalez and Solano-Ruiz, 2016). Another benefit of using students' reflections

in education is metacognition. According to Miedijensky (2016) ‘metacognition emphasizes the active role of the learner during knowledge construction, and the learner’s ability to monitor and control learning processes’ (p. 2).

### **Benefits of Extracurricular Activities for English Language Learners**

According to the Rodel Foundation of Arizona, extracurricular activities are defined as “any optional, non-credit educational or recreational activity that supplements the education program of the school” (Bartkus et al., 2012, p. 697). The Chicago Unified School District offers the following definition: “An extracurricular activity is not part of the regular school curriculum, is not graded, does not offer credit, and does not take place during classroom time” (Bartkus et al., 2012, p. 697).

A study conducted in Turkey by Coskun (2016) examined the benefits of out-of-class speaking activities for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students which resulted from the need to provide more English practice into students’ experiences, because the only time they were able to practice English was in the classroom. The author also claims that “successful language learning in a variety of contexts all over the world is often associated with the learners’ ability to continue learning English outside the classroom” (p. 1449).

Having examined the implementation of extracurricular activities at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau in Indonesia, Diniaty and Kurniati (2014) concluded that extracurricular activities aim to develop:

- a) quality of human formation;
- b) students’ talents and knowledge;
- c) students’ responsibility and professionalism;
- d) students’ active engagement in learning activities; and

e) new strategies for students' assessment.

Furthermore, the benefits of extracurricular activities were connected with lower emotional-anxiety, higher pro-social behavior, and higher self-image (Guevremont et al., 2014). Neely and Vaquera (2017) also suggested that extracurricular activities significantly decrease students' drop-out rates, and the more extracurricular activities that are available to students the greater reduction of the dropout they might provide.

### **Benefits of Online Education**

Globalization has become one of the main contemporary trends, and online education is one of the tools that help to achieve this goal. Many universities around the world offer an option to study online starting from separate courses and ending with fully completed online degrees. Bannier (2016) states that “many global regions with well-developed higher education infrastructures are experiencing a shift in momentum from traditional classrooms to online environments” (p. 80). Since more universities are adopting this type of education, knowing what benefits come from studying and teaching online is important for those educational institutions that have not yet become a part of the global educational community. According to Bannier (2016), traditional face-to-face university programs do not help in expanding intellectual infrastructure, while online education has many fewer geographical barriers. Xu and Rees (2016) support the necessity of further internationalization of higher education. Along with expanding the borders of higher education, online education allows universities to create partnerships and improve teaching approaches by becoming aware of the cultural differences of students from different countries. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) defined academic culture as “the system of beliefs, expectations, and cultural practices about how to perform academically” (p. 76). The perception of what academic culture is has not changed since 1996. Leithwood and Sun (2018) defines

academic culture as “the norms and beliefs that would lead a school staff to adopt an unrelenting focus on academic goals for all students and make the most out of the time they spend with those students” (p. 351). Thus, the more cultural practices that are combined together, the better learning outcomes students will achieve at the end of the course or the whole degree program.

Several studies were conducted to investigate students’ expectations about online learning and what approaches and strategies are better to address students’ needs. Harvey et al. (2017), investigated to what extent gender differences influence students’ satisfaction from online learning. The study showed that gender differences do not significantly affect students’ satisfaction, but ethnical and culture differences do. The study also showed that students who grew up with technology expect an interactive and collaborative learning setting. Additionally, Loh et al. (2014) reported that “flexibility and better learning outcomes are the most striking perceived benefits of e-learning” (p. 135).

### **Benefits of Online Writing**

Wang (2017) analyzed the benefits of computer-based writing technologies in writing classes. Cloud computing technologies allow users to access data from any computer anytime. These technologies are free or inexpensive and can be easily used by teachers to support students’ learning. Cloud technologies benefit universities because they do not require any significant costs and do not require installing software on the users’ computers. One of the Cloud technologies that can be used for teaching a course on academic English writing is Google Docs. Google Docs provides a stable and secure platform. It allows many students to edit documents and write comments simultaneously. Google Docs can be accessed from many devices such as a computer, laptop, tablet, or cell phone. This accessibility can be beneficial for students as they will be able to participate in an online academic writing course anytime and anywhere.

Another study on the use of computer distance education in academic English writing suggests that the majority of students who took part in the study reported going online for information as a primary source. The students also reported that they preferred the autonomous learning with some elements of interaction between them and other students and a teacher (Liu & Zhang, 2018). Hansson and Moberg (2011) also claim that universities have to develop new ways of educational practices and embed distance education courses into their curricula because a new generation of students take technologies and the Internet for granted. Aberg et al. (2016) add to the advantages of using distance education as a tool for teaching academic writing to students. They point out that unlike traditional classroom education, online education gives students an opportunity to assess the information the course offers without any time limitations.

### **Online Writing Technologies**

Kwak (2017) looked at different approaches used in academic writing courses taught through online technologies. He not only points out that students should to be taught how to write well, but also emphasizes the need to change the model many teachers use when they teach writing courses. Since the 1990s, one of the most popular approaches teachers use is writing the five-paragraph Hamburger essay. This kind of essay consists of several paragraphs starting from a topic sentence, followed by several supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence at the end. However, other approaches exist when it comes to teaching academic writing. Some of them are called writing as a skill, creative writing, writing as a process, writing as a social practice, and writing in a socio-cultural context. Writing as a skill mostly focuses on textual analysis; so does creative writing. However, creative writing and writing as a process also focus on cognitive perspective. And writing as a social practice and writing in a socio-cultural context emphasize the importance of a social practice perspective (Balestrini, 2015). Having analyzed all of these

approaches to teaching academic writing, it is possible to conclude that textual analysis such as describing the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in a text is the easiest aspect of writing for students to master and the one many teachers pay most attention to.

Robertson (2014) analyzed the results of the study based on examining students' essays in a distance course on academic writing. He concluded that students' writing depends on their cognitive processes such as working memory, mental representation, and memory retrieval. The whole conception of the writing process includes cognition, writing strategies, and students' conception of the writing process. Therefore, even if teachers teach their students to approach writing as a skill, they can still expect that students will write according to their own conceptions of the writing process. With this in mind, it is possible to conclude that one essay question will result in different structural organizations. Thus, understanding the importance of developing students' cognitive and cultural abilities in another language is essential for students' success in academic writing (Robertson, 2014).

### **Successful Learning in Online Education**

Despite all of the benefits that online education might offer to all parties involved, the factors that are important in addressing students' needs should be considered. Since the student-centered approach in education is a predominant one, several studies have looked at students' expectations from online education. Ilgaz and Gulbahar (2015) showed that such factors as instructional content, communication with an instructor, the instructor's competence, delivery approach, and variety of materials used influence students' success in online learning. The students who participated in the study also indicated that easy access to technology is an important factor because this is central to the advantages of online education. Another study conducted by Miliszewska (2007) emphasized the importance of interaction with an instructor



for the students. Because of this, the majority of the student participants opposed a purely online course favoring a blended one. However, the students also recognized that the Internet is a useful resource (Miliszewska, 2007).

Similarly, Jagannathan and Blair (2013) looked at student engagement and motivation in online education. Their study indicated that authentic learning can positively affect students' motivation in online learning. At the same time, students' engagement can be achieved by providing opportunities for students' collaboration such as peer reviews. Support systems are also important because some students have never had or had very little experience with online courses. These studies show, the role of an instructor in the course is a crucial factor in achieving students' success through online education. Volungeviciene and Leduc (2006) examined different roles of an instructor in online education. When teaching online, an instructor should be able to combine technical, managerial, pedagogical, and social roles as online education unites people only virtually, but at the same time it allows them "to ignore administrative and national borders and distance" if implemented properly (Volungeviciene and Leduc, 2006, p. 20).

### **Student and Teacher Perceptions**

An article written by Butler et al. (2014) analyzes student and teacher perceptions on academic writing in English in Russia, the country where the research of this paper was conducted. The authors emphasize the relevance of classes on academic writing for university students in Russia and the need for Russian students as well as teachers to learn more about the culture, meanings, and interpretations of academic writing in English. However, many teachers and students have negative experience with writing, even if they consider it important. The latter usually blame their instructors if they encounter difficulties with writing assignments. And if this negative experience becomes permanent, students can become reluctant writers (Asadifard and

Koosha, 2013). The authors also state that “different individuals experienced different levels of anxiety towards writing, and that anxiety levels would correlate with levels of writing performance” (p. 1573).

Nevertheless, research shows that students’ affective filter can be lowered when technology is incorporated into writing courses. Hani (2015) has examined students’ perceptions on using mobile phones when introducing writing courses. The research showed that the students expressed positive attitudes towards using technology because of “the impulsive, pervasive, colloquial, contextual, portable, ubiquitous, and personal characteristics of the mobile learning, learners were equipped with more access and utmost exposure to copious genuine learning conditions” (Hani, 2015, p. 200). Erarslan and Topkaya (2017) also suggest that online learning can be beneficial for students in two ways. First, they can use it as an alternative to traditional education. Second, online education tools can be used as a supplement to traditional courses and enhance students’ learning.

A study conducted by Hung and Young (2015) showed that students who used e-readers performed better in their writing assignments than students who used printed materials. This study lends itself to the nature of an interdisciplinary approach to writing. Reading and writing skills could be taught side by side. The e-readers can provide model texts for writing. In essence, students can learn how to model academic writing by reading high quality academic textual information. The study also found that students relied heavily on using Internet resources as they wrote. The integration of e-readers was seen as useful also from peer groups’ and teachers’ perspectives because “e-readers have the potential to assist the EFL students in academic writing and function as a handled library, an annotating tool, a medium for sharing annotations and comments, and storage for revised drafts” (Hung & Young, 2015, p. 260).

Sun and Chang (2012) looked at another way of incorporating technology into the writing process. The researchers analyzed the use of blogs and their influence on students' learning and motivation. The study emphasized the need to use technology in writing courses based on the finding that blogs allowed students to scaffold each other and to understand their identities as academic writers. Furthermore, Liu and Lang (2016) analyzed the benefits of the use of Google Docs on students' collaboration and motivation. The study showed that students had positive experiences when they were asked to work together, and their anxiety levels decreased.

### **Social Constructivism Framework**

The idea of cognitive constructivism was first introduced by Jean Piaget. "Constructivism traditionally is considered to focus on how people make meaning of or construct knowledge when interacting with content knowledge and the active process of this interaction" (Schrader, 2015 p. 24). The notion of constructivism reflects the learner's reflective interactions with objects and people in the environment (Schrader, 2015). Schrader further analyzes Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective on constructivism theory, according to which "the social and cultural environment, artifacts, tools, temporal elements, and engagement with both peers and – importantly – with others to both explain how meaning making takes place and how learning occurs" (p. 24).

Relying on the theory of social constructivism, Mishra (2014) states the more teachers work on their pedagogical practices the better students' experience in the community will be. One of the pedagogical approaches teachers should use is to encourage students to create learning communities. The study showed that "students [in learning communities] had developed ways of communicating, reasoning, and providing arguments to defend their ideas as they practiced in and contribute to the norms and practices of their learning communities" (p. 10). The

author also mentions the basic ideas that come from the socio-cultural approach and that teachers should rely on to scaffold students' learning:

- a) authentic activities help construct students' knowledge;
- b) students should reflect on their learning experience; and
- c) social interaction is an important part of students' success in learning (Mishra, 2014).

Mensah (2015) explored the role of constructivist perspectives in the college classroom and pointed out that promotion of active student engagement develops the students' higher order thinking, metacognitive skills, and collaborative learning skills. Philpott and Batty (2009) also emphasize the importance of engaging students as it encourages them to work harder when they are asked to solve a problem and to offer more solutions to it.

The expansion of online education has created a need to transfer the benefits of the theory of social constructivism into an online environment. The research shows there is a large number of valuable practices could be implemented to improve students' learning experiences. For example, Zhu et al. (2010) focused on online collaborative learning in higher education and reported that collaborative learning allows students to see multiple perspectives on a topic and develop critical thinking skills through online discussion groups. The authors also noted that online educational environment is heavily influenced by the theory of social constructivism and creates new roles for teachers and students as they experience another classroom culture.

Bryceson (2006) analyzed tools that teachers should use to scaffold their students online. These tools include the following:

- a) emails that can be used for routine conversations, questions, and discussions;
- b) computer conferencing technologies that allow to exchange ideas and collaborate;

- c) lists of frequently-asked questions that provide students with the necessary information for self-direction;
- d) hyperlinked resources that promote students' searching and research-selection skills;
- e) collaborative workspaces that provide an opportunity to share ideas and teach students social responsibility; and
- f) online chats that allow students to receive immediate responses promoting peer support.

The study showed that some strategies are necessary if teachers want their students to perform well in online learning. Teachers should utilize the following recommended strategies:

- a) Require students to use Discussion Boards;
- b) Provide initial questions to promote students' discussion;
- c) While teacher should participate in discussions, they should do so in a non-judgmental manner;
- d) Require their students participate in a discussion more than once; and
- e) Repeat the discussion process several times during the course (Bryceson, 2006).

Another study conducted by Thoms and Eryilmaz (2013) analyzed the role of Twitter discussions in supporting students' online learning. The study showed that tools such as Twitter, blogs, and wikis encourage individuals "work together toward common goals, collaborating on common problems, sharing best practices, supporting one another, and sharing a common identity" (p. 270).

Furthermore, combining the theory of social constructivism and online learning, in particular, online writing workshops, Jensen (2016) concluded that the use of peer-review is important as it provides helpful feedback despite of the absence of verbal communication.

Moreover, the study showed that students favored online writing workshops to traditional classroom workshops because the latter was not flexible and convenient.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

This Chapter discusses the research methodology for this mixed methods study conducted to investigate the effects of a two-week extra-curricular online academic English writing course on Russian second and fifth year university students. A mixed method study was used to validate the research findings of the study. Both types of data, quantitative and qualitative, were separately analyzed and further compared. This Chapter also includes the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures that are considered the most suitable to answer the research questions.

Triangulation was used to validate data from the following sources: pre- and post-questionnaires, the students' reflections, assignments and the instructor's feedback, and interviews. According to Wilson (2016), 'triangulation refers to using more than one particular approach when doing research in order to get richer, fuller data and/or to help confirm the results of the research' (p. 74). Method triangulation uses multiple methods of data collection about one phenomenon. The use of triangulation in the study allows to achieve a broader understanding of the phenomenon. Limiting data collection to one or two sources may result in gaining only partial insight of the issue studied (Carter et al., 2014).

**Research Questions** are outlined in Chapter I and noted below.

The research questions addressed are:

1. What are the students' perceptions towards an online academic English writing course before and after?

A pre- and post- questionnaire will be the tool used to answer Research Question #1.

2. How will students' attitudes towards an online academic English writing course change by the end of the study?

To answer Research Question #2 students' semi-structured interviews conducted at the end of the course was used. The analysis of short students' daily written reflections and their Viber messages were used as well.

Research Question #3.

3. What are the teacher's perceptions on teaching a two-week online academic English writing module?

A semi-structured interview with the instructor at the end of the course was used to answer this question.

### **Participants and Setting**

There were 14 participants in the study, 13 students and the teacher who managed the course. The students study at the Department of Foreign Languages at Kursk State University in Kursk, Russia. The students were in the second and fifth year of a five-year bachelor's program. Their English language proficiency levels varied from low-intermediate to intermediate at the second year of studying and from upper-intermediate to advanced, during the fifth year. All of the participants were native speakers of Russian. All of the participants were female. None of the participants had previously taken any online courses at the university during their program of studies.

### **Qualitative Methodology**

Because I wanted to understand an event that occurs to a group at a particular point of time, I included qualitative methods to reflect on what research participants meant by their answers in the online course and to provide a more engaging research experience. Thus, I used a



case study approach. Case study research helps to understand a complex issue and offers an in-depth analysis of it (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Abercrombie et al. (1984) defined case study as “the detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypothesis, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases” (p. 34). The case study method is useful when a researcher has to answer “how?” and “why?” questions, when she does not have control of behavioral events, and when the research focuses on contemporary events (Yin, 2014). The single case-study rationale was chosen to capture the circumstances and conditions of everyday situation. According to Yin (2014), a single case study focuses on “the lessons it might provide about the social processes related to some theoretical interest” (p. 52). Another reason to choose a case study method was its well-developed procedure when conducting research. Other benefits of case study research are the following:

- a) a case study can serve different purposes; it can explain, explore, or describe a phenomenon;
- b) a case study focuses on reaching casual interferences that apply only to the case; and
- c) case study methodology is concerned with case selection (Elman et al., 2016).

The case study will provide a summary and conclusion allowing others to learn from the results.

### **Documentary Analysis**

Students’ reflections, peer reviews, and general communication during the course was used to analyze the students’ experience in the course.

## **Data Collection**

A deductive approach was used for data analysis. The research questions were used for grouping the collected data (Ayalon et al., 2008). The following steps were followed in the data analysis process: transcribing, organizing, coding, validation the data, and concluding the data analysis.

## **Student Reflections**

Using reflection for assessment allows not only evaluate students' work, but also develop students' critical thinking and metacognitive skills. More than that, this type of assessment helps switching from 'authority-based models to a critical model based on demonstration of university education and the principle of student responsibility for learning' (Siles-Gonzalez and Solano-Ruiz, p. 132). The rubric used in this study was simple and provided concise and clear guidelines for the instructor to follow during the course. Such types of rubrics are not used at the university where the study was conducted, and, the main purpose was not to overwhelm the instructor with extra work by offering complicated criteria to follow.

## **Participant Interviews**

The interviews were conducted and recorded with the teacher (see Appendix F) who was asked to manage the course and several students (see Appendix G, H) at the end of the two weeks. The interviews focused on convenience of such courses, students' motivation to participate in the course, students' learning outcomes, and teacher's perception of the course.

## **Research Procedure**

First, I contacted the potential instructor of the course and asked her permission to participate in a study by teaching and managing the online course (See Appendix E). After permission was granted, the instructor was asked to sign a consent form (See Appendix B) and

invited to a professional development online academic writing training from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. facilitated by the researcher. Directly after the training with the instructor, the students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages received an invitation to participate in the study (See Appendix D). I planned to recruit only second-year students at first, because the teacher I contacted worked closely with only second-year students. However, when the invitation letter was distributed, several of the fifth-year students were interested in participating in the study as well. After the volunteers were recruited through the instructor, they were asked to sign a consent form (See Appendix C) and complete a pre-questionnaire for the course.

The Viber (messaging and calling app) group was created by the instructor, and students received access to the course created on Google platform by the instructor as well. The students who did not have Google accounts were asked to create one. During the two-week course, the students completed short daily reading and writing assignments and self-reflection journals. At the end of the two weeks, the participants were asked to complete a post-questionnaire, and several students were randomly selected for informal interviews via Skype. The interview with the instructor was conducted last. All interviews were recorded.

The next step was to transcribe 1) the interview with the trainer, 2) three individual interviews, and 3) one group interview. Unfortunately, the group interview had only two students, because no other participants would agree to participate.

### **Coding**

I coded the responses using open coding as part of grounded theory as the research paradigm in order to find patterns and themes that would emerge from the textual data. According to Glaser (2016), open coding helps generating a set of concepts that work with relevancy to be integrated into a theory. In the initial analysis, I used open coding to examine,

compare, and categorize data. Open coding involves labeling as many relevant categories as possible.

### **Researcher Role**

Since I developed the online academic writing course, the teacher who was asked to manage the course was unfamiliar with the course design and had no experience in online teaching. For this reason, a training session was provided to ensure that the course would be able to meet its goals. Topics such as how to manage Google Services and Viber, how to promote students' participation, how to provide feedback, and how to grade assignments were discussed during the training session. As a researcher, my role was to support the teacher during the course, but I did not have any contact with the students. I had access to all the materials students wrote as well as to the feedback the instructor provided to the students. I was also a member of the Viber group that was created at the very beginning of the course. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with the students and the instructor of the course. And finally, the instructor received instruction and support from me during the two weeks of the course.

### **Quantitative Methods**

#### **Pre- and post-questionnaire design.**

Both the pre- and post- questionnaire were designed according to recommendations described by Song et al. (2015). The following recommendations were considered during the design process:

- “a) appropriately operationalize the key concept for the target population;
- b) choose a clear response format;
- c) generate items and confirm final items using face or content validity” (p. 324).

Other recommendations that were also considered:

- a) placing the easy questions first;
- b) placing most important questions in the middle;
- c) leaving open questions to the end (Fink, 2013).

Both questionnaires were created in Google Surveys. This tool aggregates and analyses responses from users and presents individual and group the results in an online interface. The median and mode were used to measure the most common patterns of the data.

### **Post-Questionnaire.**

Before the course started, the participants completed a pre-questionnaire concerning their experience in academic writing, course expectations, and experience with online courses.

### **Post-questionnaire.**

After the completion of the two-week course, the participants completed the post-questionnaire concerning their perceptions of the course, academic writing improvement, and willingness to work with future distance courses of this kind.

### **Feedback**

In this study all the students were volunteers, and the course was not a part of their curriculum. Thus, the grades were not used to evaluate their work. Instead, the daily feedbacks were used to encourage and motivate students.

1. Viber was used to write general comments about the students' completion of the tasks.
2. Individual feedback was provided as comments in Google Docs, the area where students created and posted their responses.

Besides, grading is a very complex process that involves many factors such as effort or class behavior. Formative assessment was chosen instead, since formative assessment is the type of assessment that scaffolds students' learning (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014).

## **Instruments**

In qualitative research, the main instrument is the researcher. I, the researcher, observed the online training virtually, took notes, coached the instructor, designed the interview protocols, and conducted the interviews. According to Creswell (2009), a good interviewer needs the following skills: technical competence, interactive competence, attention and steering, competencies in communication theory and knowing how to deal with previous knowledge and personal bias. Also, because I coached the instructor I was an active participant in the research. One of the main bias in research connected with the active researcher engagement in the proses is conformation bias. Conformation bias occurs when a researcher uses participants' information to confirm her hypothesis without focusing on multiple perspectives that might influence the research analysis (Sarniak, 2015). To avoid this type of bias a researcher needs to question her preexisting hypotheses and assumptions.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Participants agreed to, and signed a form indicating, informed consent. Participants were advised of their rights to privacy and that there were no adverse consequences from withdrawing from the research study.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this Chapter was to provide a rationale for the methodology of this qualitative study and detail the data collection methods and instruments used. It also identified and described the participants and the mixed methods data analysis process.

## Chapter IV

### Research Findings

#### Questionnaires

##### Pre-questionnaire.

The participants (n = 13) who completed the pre-questionnaire were Kursk State University students from the Foreign Languages department. All of the participants were female, 53.8% were 18 years old, 38.5% were in the age between 22 to 24, and 7.7% were between 19 to 24. The students who participated in the study were second-year students and fifth-year bachelors students. 100% of the participants reported that none of them had taken an online class before.

##### Question 1: What is your age?

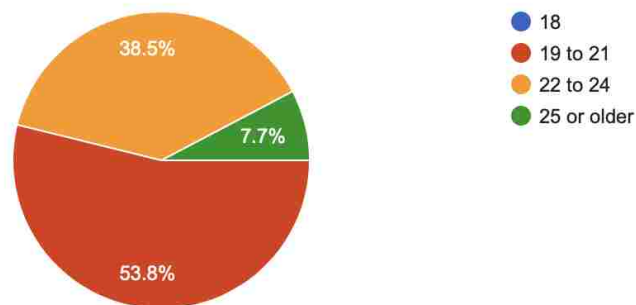
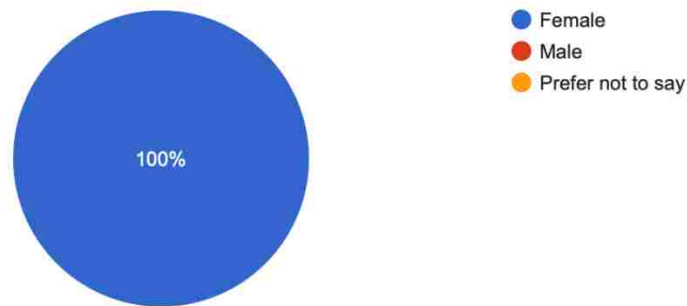


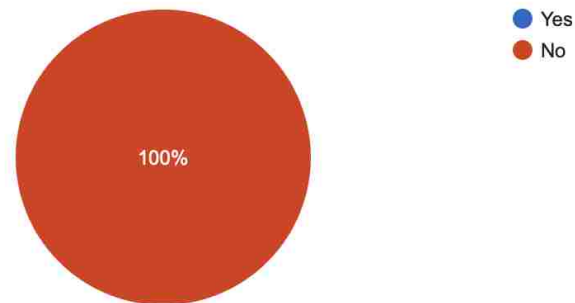
Figure 1. Age

**Question 2: What is your gender?**



*Figure 2. Gender*

**Question 3: Have you ever taken an online class?**



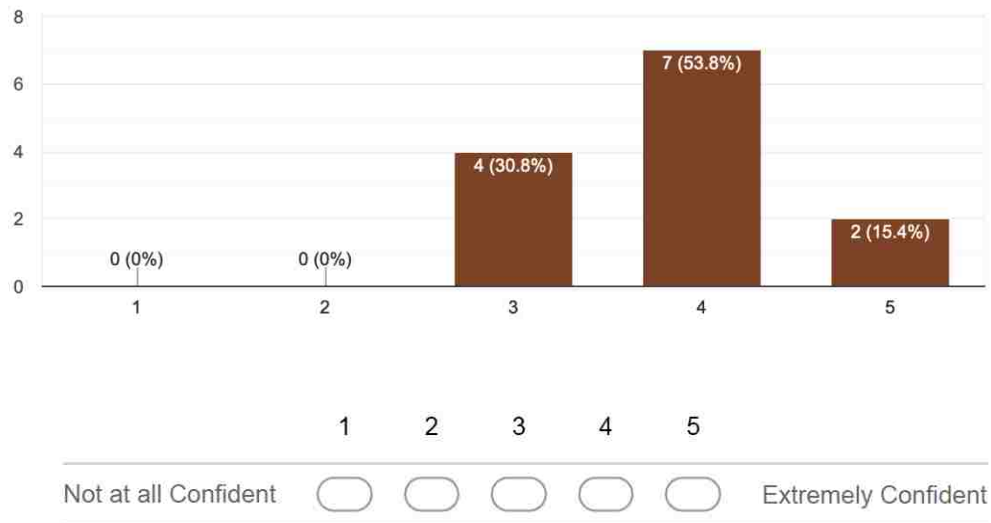
*Figure 3. Online course experience*

**Question 4: If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, please, briefly describe your experience.**

None of the participants were able to answer Question 4 because as it is indicated in Figure 3, none of the participants had an experience with online learning.



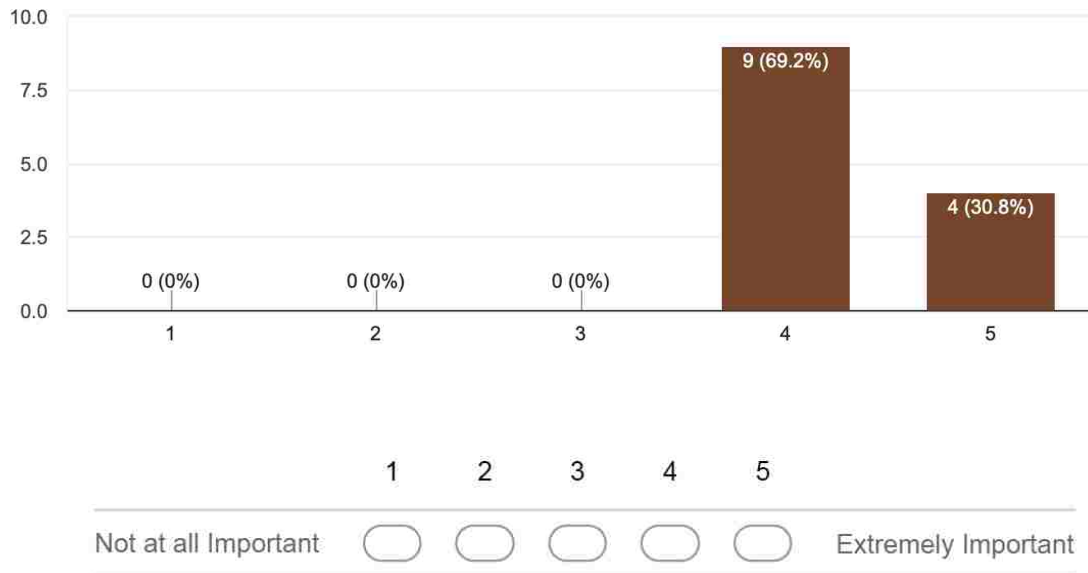
**Question 5: How confident do you feel about using technology for learning purpose?**



*Figure 4. Confidence with technology*

As it is seen from Figure 4 the majority of the participants of the course rated their confidence with technology quite high. 15,4% of the participants ranked their confidence with technology as ‘extremely confident’, 53,8% indicated that they are “very confident”, and 30.8% indicated that they feel “moderately confident” while using technology for learning purposes. None of the students chose “slightly confident” of “not at all confident”.

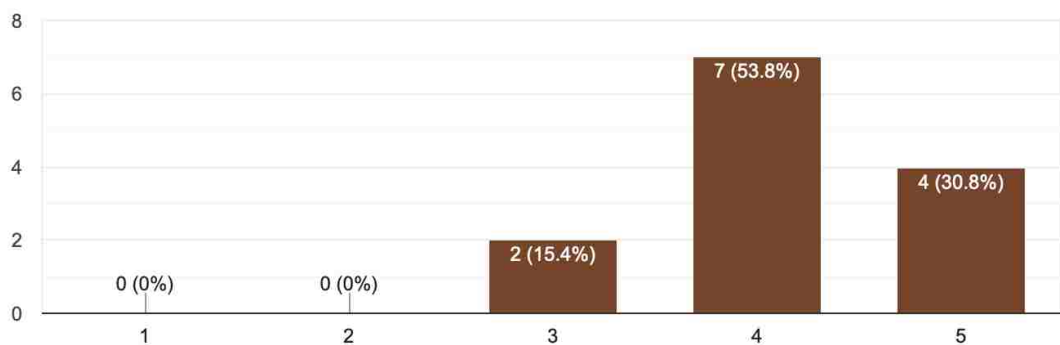
**Question 6: How important is online learning?**



*Figure 5. Importance of online learning*

All the participants ranked the importance of online learning very high. 30.8% of the participants indicated that they consider online learning “extremely important”, and 69.2% of the participants indicated that online learning is “very important”. The findings were unexpected because as Figure 3 shows none of the participants had an online learning experience before.

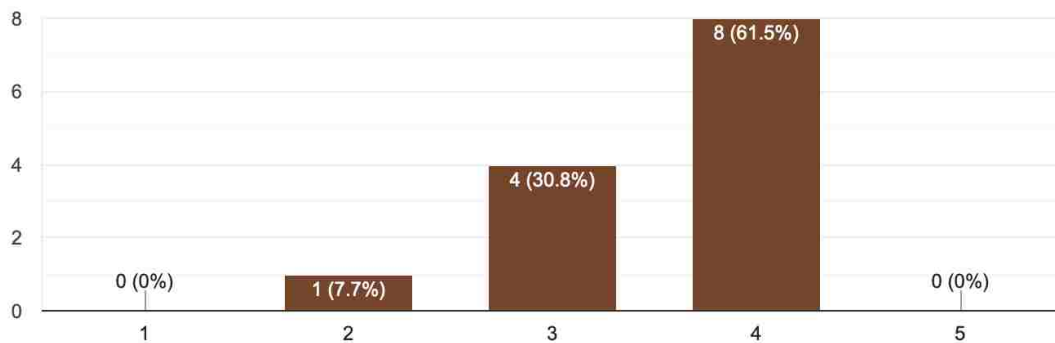
**Question 7: How confident do you feel about writing in your native language?**



*Figure 6. Confidence about writing in the native language*

Figure 6 shows the level of confidence the participants had about writing in their native language Russian. The participants indicated their confidence as “moderately confident”, “very confident”, and “extremely confident”. The majority of the students (53.8%) ranked their confidence about writing in Russian as “very confident”.

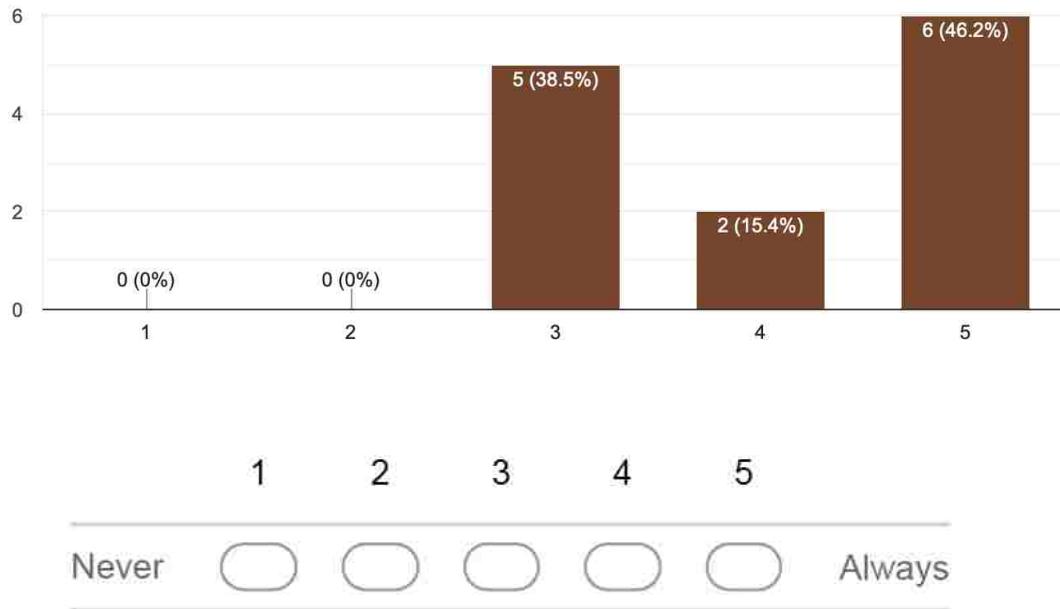
**Question 8: How confident do you feel about writing in English?**



*Figure 7.* Confidence about writing in English

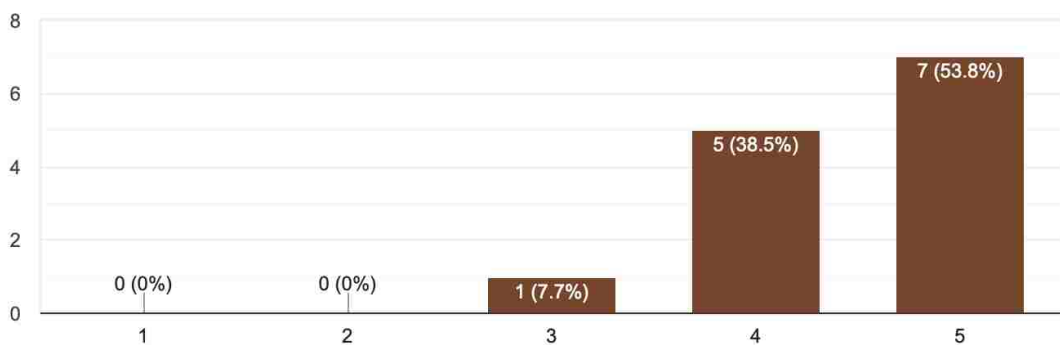
As it is seen from Figure 7, none of the participants felt “extremely confident” about writing in English. However, the majority of the students (61.5%) indicated that they feel “very confident” about writing in English, and only one participant (7.7%) indicated that she felt “slightly confident” about writing in English. Nevertheless, Figures 8-12 show the frequency of the assignments types the participants usually had in their course work. These data showed that writing course papers in English was not very frequent in the participants’ course work.

**Question 9: Rate the frequency of the types of writing assigned in your university coursework: TRANSLATION.**



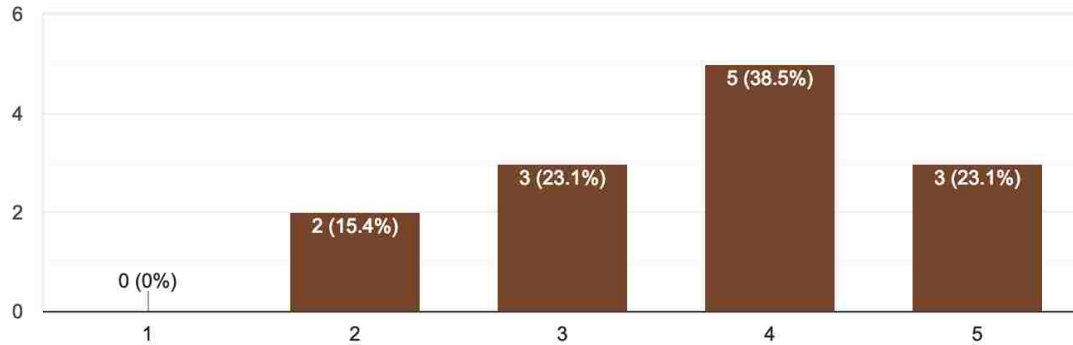
*Figure 8.* Frequency of translation assignments in the university coursework

**Question 10: Rate the frequency of the types of writing assigned in your university coursework: GRAMMAR EXERCISES.**



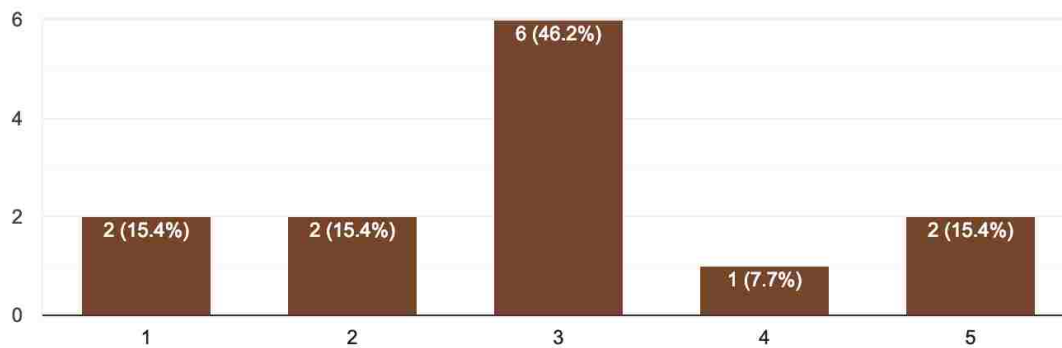
*Figure 9.* Frequency of grammar exercises in the university course work

**Question 11: Rate the frequency of the types of writing assigned in your university coursework: ESSAYS.**



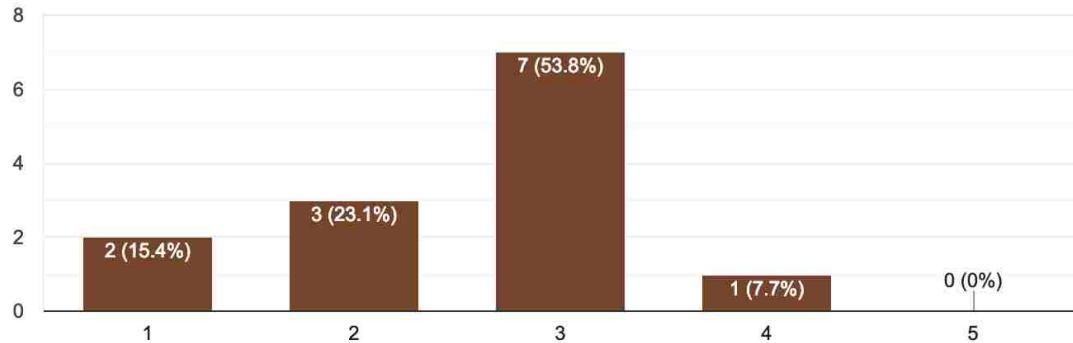
*Figure 10.* Frequency of essays in the university course work

**Question 12: Rate the frequency of the types of writing assigned in your university coursework: REFLECTIONS.**



*Figure 11.* Frequency of reflections in the university course work

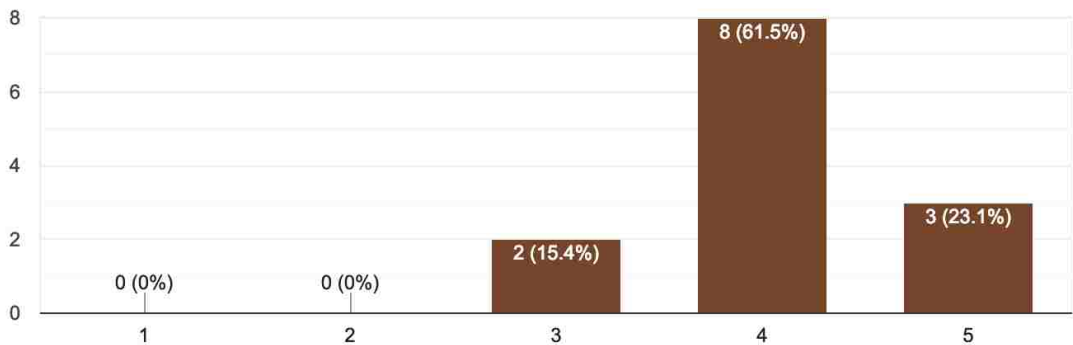
**Question 13: Rate the frequency of the types of writing assigned in your university coursework: COURSE PAPERS.**



*Figure 12.* Frequency of course papers in the university course work

As seen from the Figures 8-13 above, grammar exercises and translation were the most common exercises the students have in their course work. Essay writing sometimes was a part of the curriculum; however, reflections and course papers were quite rarely used.

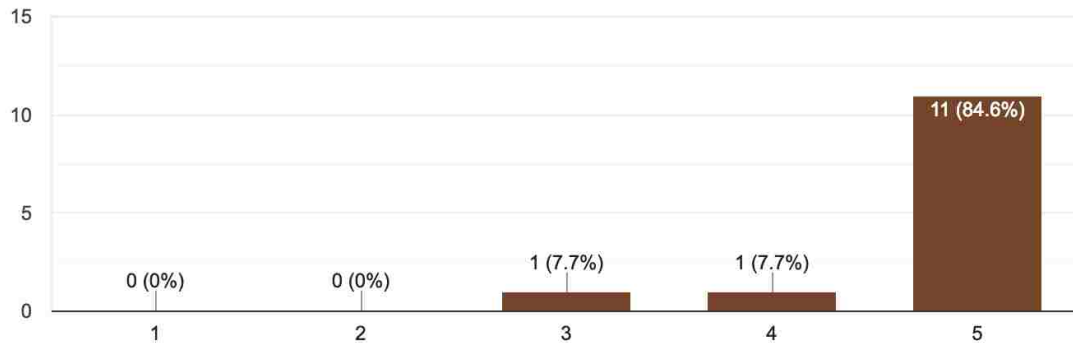
**Question 14: How do you feel about academic English writing?**



*Figure 13.* Confidence in academic English writing

**Question 15: How do you feel about the aspects of academic English writing: GRAMMAR?**

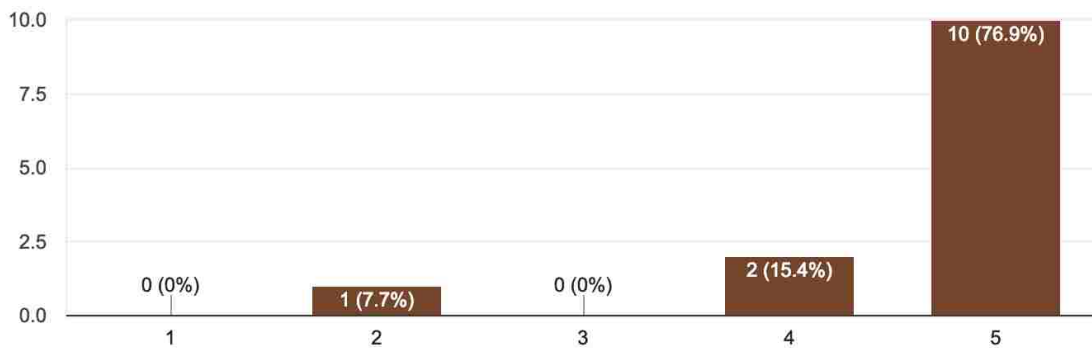
**Grammar is defined as the study of the way words are used to make sentences.**



*Figure 14.* Importance of using grammar in academic English writing

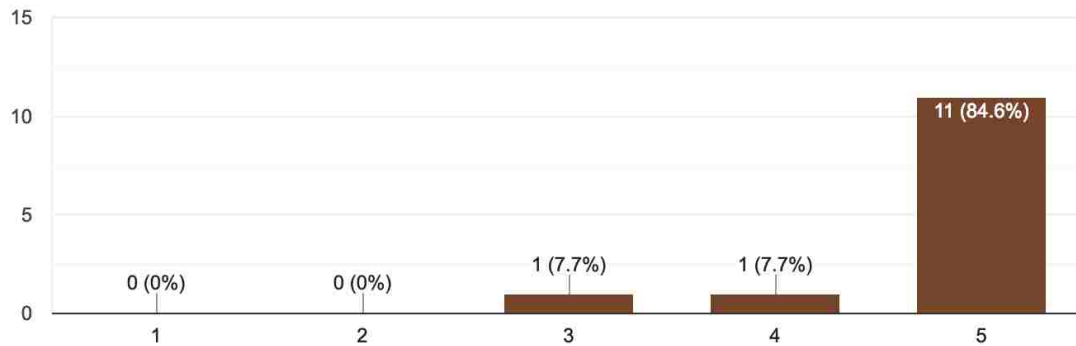
**Question 16: How do you feel about the aspects of academic English writing: WORD**

**CHOICE? Word choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language appropriate to your audience and purpose.**



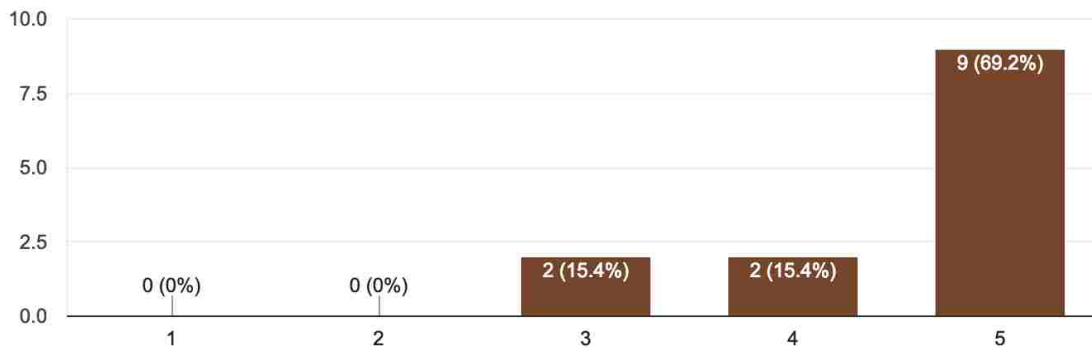
*Figure 13.* Importance of using appropriate word choice in academic English writing

**Question 17: How do you feel about the aspects of academic English writing: SENTENCE STRUCTURE? Sentence structure is defined as the way a sentence is arranged grammatically.**



*Figure 16.* Importance of using appropriate grammar structure in academic English writing

**Question 18: How do you feel about the aspects of academic English writing: COHESION? Cohesion is defined as the grammatical and lexical linking within a text or sentence that holds a text together and gives it meaning.**



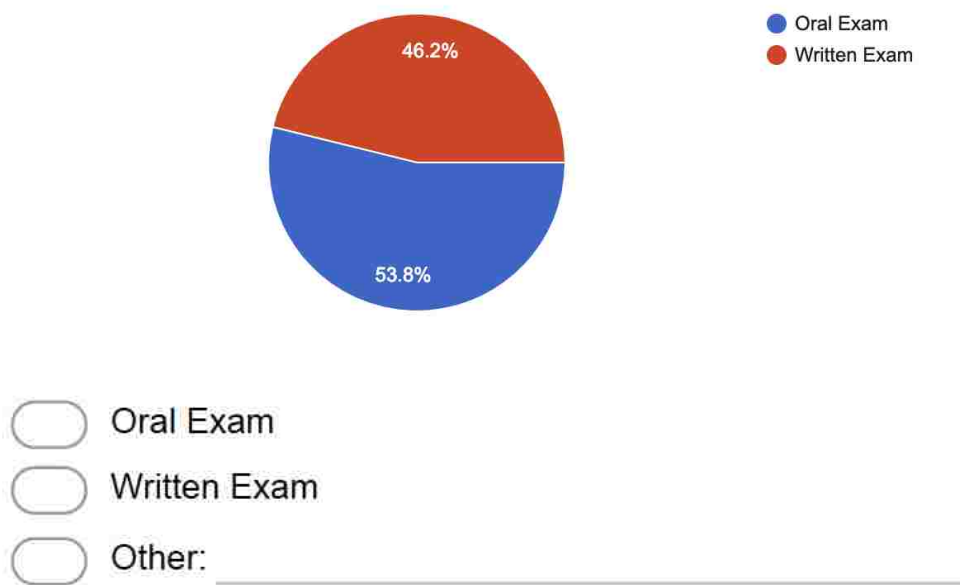
*Figure 17.* Importance of using appropriate cohesion in academic English writing

Figures 14-17 show how important the use of appropriate grammar, words, sentence structure, and cohesion in academic English writing is. The data show that 84.6% of the participants felt that appropriate grammar was “extremely important” in academic English



writing. 76.9% of the participants rated appropriate word choice as “extremely important”. 84.6% of the participants voted that appropriate sentence structure is “extremely important”, and 69.2% of the participants indicated that they considered appropriate cohesion “extremely important”. All of the participants mentioned aspects of academic English writing have received a significant level of importance; however, the use of appropriate grammar and sentence structure received the highest number of votes, and cohesion was the least supported aspect. Wyse and Torgerson’ study (2017) presents similar findings on the effectiveness of teaching grammar to support students’ writing.

**Question 19: Which type of exam is your preference?**



*Figure 18. Exam preference*

Figure 18 shows the exam type preference among the participants of the study. Written exams received a slightly higher number of votes (53.8%) compared to the oral exams (46.2%). Overall, this data does not show any significant difference in the exam type preference.

**Question 20: Rate the preference of your learning style: TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM LEARNING (Traditional classroom learning is defined as a type of learning in which the teacher provides face-to-face instruction to students).**

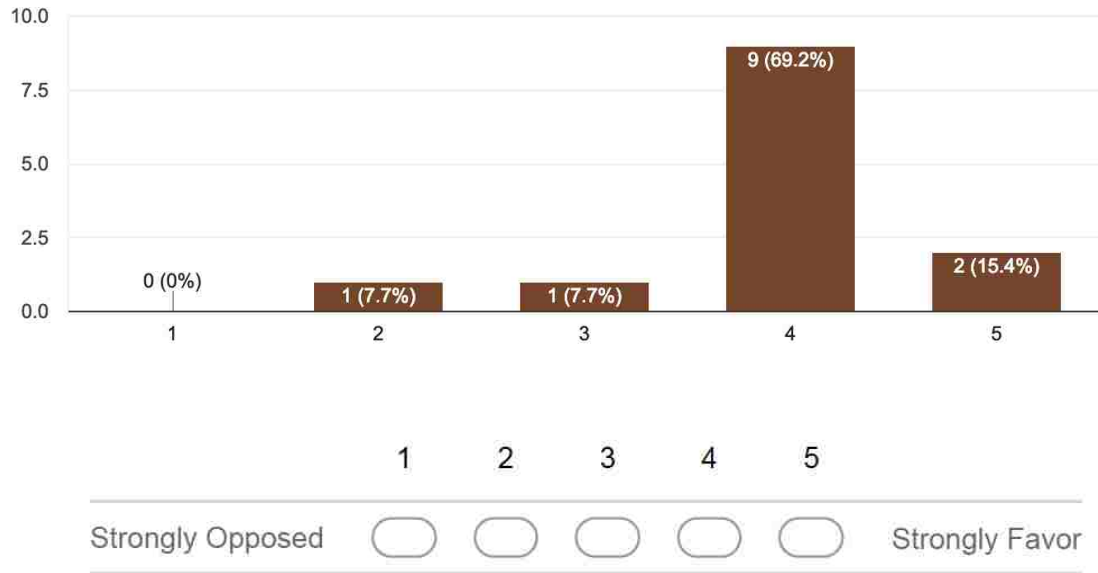


Figure 19. Traditional classroom learning preference

**Question 21: Rate the preference of your learning style: ONLINE LEARNING.**

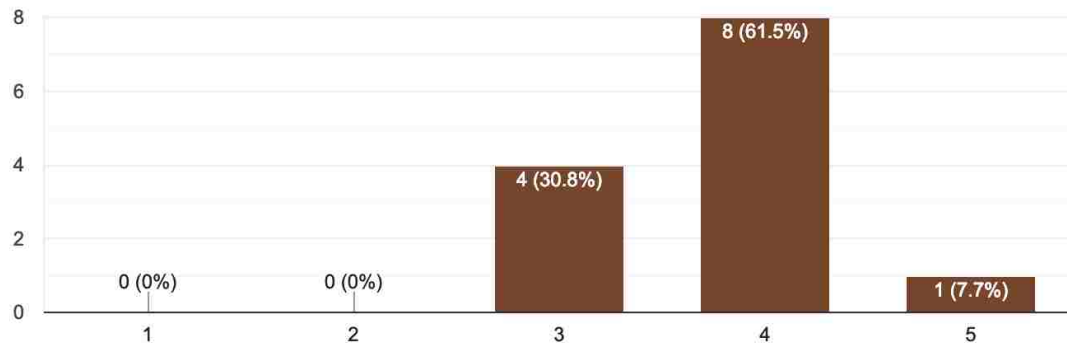
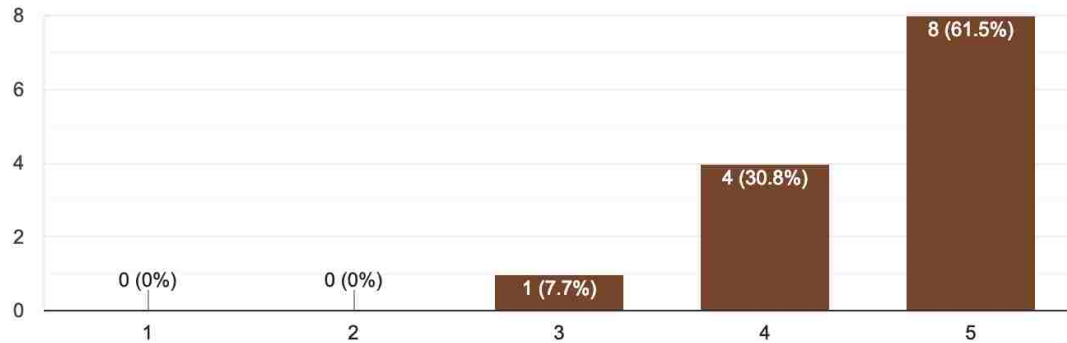


Figure 20. Online learning preference

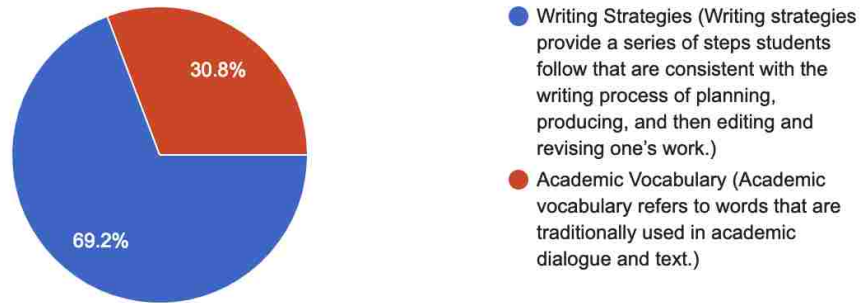
**Question 22: Rate the preference of your learning style: BLENDED LEARNING (Blended learning is defined as a mix of face-to-face and online instruction to students).**



*Figure 21. Blended learning preference*

As it can be seen from the Figures 19-21, 61.5 % of the students gave the highest rating to the blended type of learning, though all the students who participated in the study had never had any online classes before. Besides, the number of people who proffered the traditional type of learning and the online learning differs only by one person.

**Question 23: What do you hope to learn in the academic English writing course?**



- Writing Strategies (Writing strategies provide a series of steps students follow that are consistent with the writing process of planning, producing, and then editing and revising one's work.)
- Academic Vocabulary (Academic vocabulary refers to words that are traditionally used in academic dialogue and text.)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 22. Academic English writing course learning expectations

The majority of the students (69.2 %) hoped to learn different writing strategies, and that can be explained because the students are not used to writing course papers, some of the students mentioned it in their reflections as well.

**Question 24: How confident are you that an online academic English writing course will benefit your future learning?**

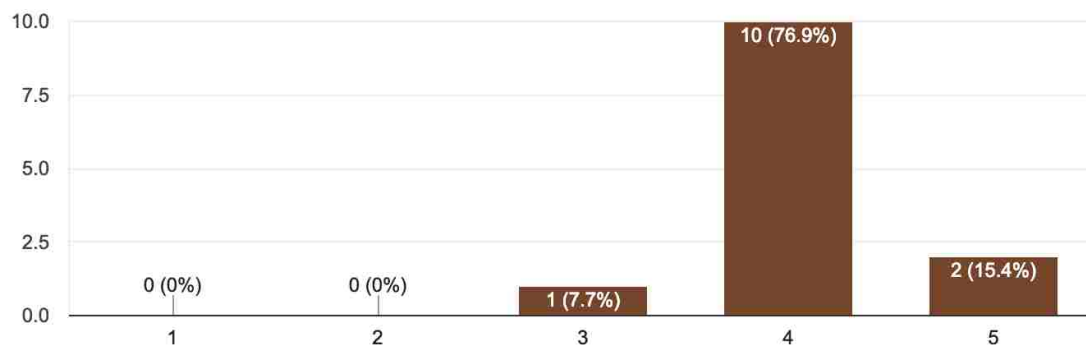


Figure 23. Usefulness of an online academic English writing course for the future learning

All of the participants indicated that an online academic English writing course will benefit their future learning. 7.7% voted that they feel “moderately confident”, 76.9% indicated that they feel “very confident”, and 15.4% of the participants were “extremely confident” about the benefits of an online academic English writing course for their future learning.

**Question 25: Which questions about academic English writing would you like the instructor to address? Cover?**

Students’ responses:

*Unfortunately, for now I don't think I have any specific questions about it.*

*I don't have questions at the moment*

*I don't have any questions yet.*

*I don't know yet, as it is my first experience*

*At the moment I have no questions*

*How to translate academic texts from Russian into English*

*Is it possible to use some non-colloquial words in some parts of the paper work?*

*What are the main mistakes done by Russian students while writing in academic English?*

*I don't have any questions*

*I don't have any particular questions at the moment.*

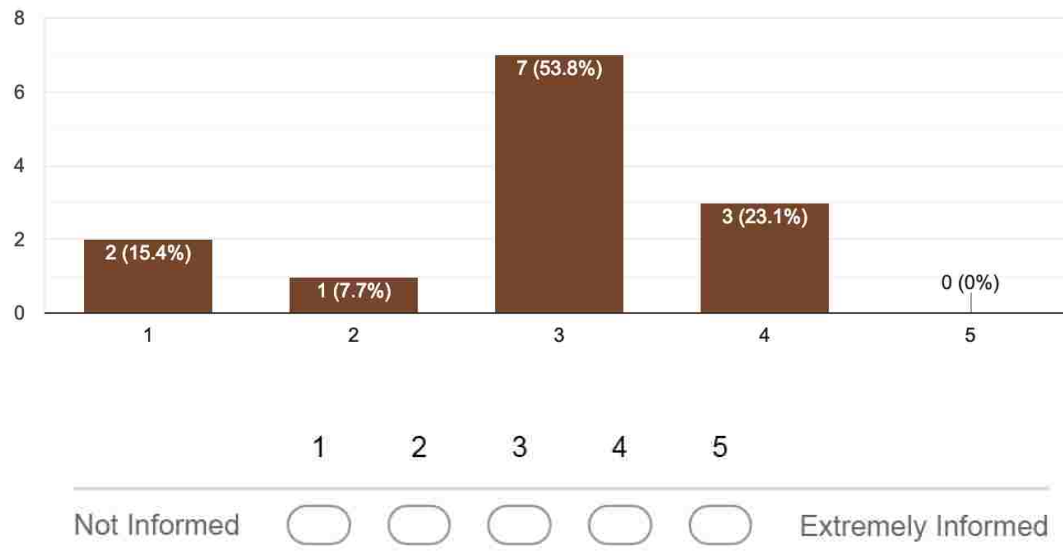
*I'm confident*

*Very confident*

*Very confident*

Only three of the 13 participants indicated that they were willing to learn about the use of non-colloquial words in academic English writing, possible errors that Russian students make when they write in English, and the strategies that are used to translate texts from Russian into English. Two of the 13 participants did not understand the question or answered another question and responded “very confident” to Question 25. Most likely, students’ language proficiency did not influence their answers. It seems that they did not pay enough attention to the question and answered another question in the pre-questionnaire.

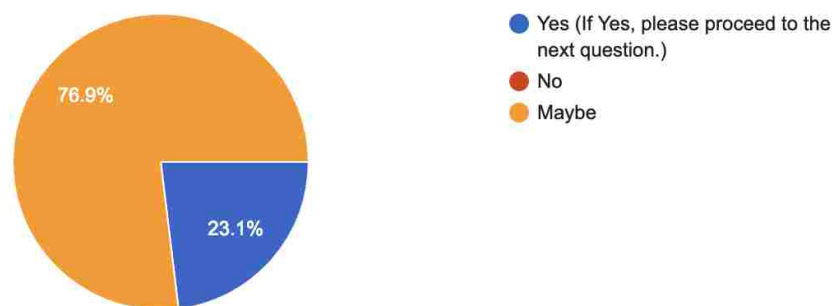
**Question 26: Rate your level of knowledge of the Bologna Declaration.**



*Figure 24. Knowledge of the Bologna Declaration*

As it is seen from Figure 24, the participants' awareness about the Bologna Process varied greatly. 15.4% of the participants indicated that they are "not informed", 7.7% were "slightly informed", 53.8% were "moderately informed", and 23.1% were "very informed". None of the participants felt 'extremely informed' about the Bologna Process.

**Question 27: Would you like to continue your education abroad?**



*Figure 25. Desire to continue education abroad*

**Question 28: I would like to study abroad in the following locations:**

Students' responses:

*America (any state), Europa; or The University of California, Berkeley*  
*The USA, the UK, Canada*  
*UK, USA, Australia*  
*One of European Universities*

As it is seen from Figure 25, only 23.1% of the participants indicated that they would like to continue their education abroad in the USA, Canada, or European countries. The majority of the participants (76,9%) were not sure about where they would like to continue their education. However, none of the participants indicated that she would not like to continue her education abroad.

**Question 29: What are your future professional career plans?**

Students' responses:

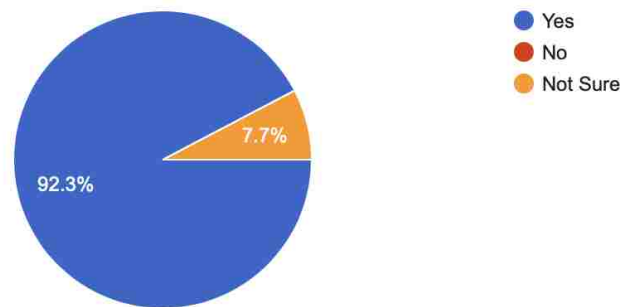
*I want to become a qualified teacher of English.*  
*Teaching kids or teenagers.*  
*English teacher.*  
*To have an opportunity to use my knowledge of languages in any area of activity I find myself interested in.*  
*Most likely, to work at school as an English teacher.*  
*Working as a teacher at school and getting a master's degree.*  
*To continue studying.*  
*Being a teacher at school.*  
*I want to be a teacher.*  
*I plan on becoming a teacher.*  
*School teacher.*  
*To become a better teacher of English*  
*Become a teacher.*

The majority of the participants (n=11) indicated that they would like to become teachers. Four of the participants specified that they would like to become school teachers. Two of the participants indicated their willingness to continue studying, and only one participant did not have any specific professional career plans.

The results of the Pre-Questionnaire helped to answer the first part of the Research Question 1 (*What are the students' perceptions towards academic writing in English before and after the course?*). Overall, the participants felt that they needed an academic English writing course because such courses are not a common practice for Russian universities (Abramova et al., 2013). Besides, the gathered data also showed that they estimated their English writing skills quite high, even though writing course papers in English is not a frequent task in their course work. Further results on Research Question 1 will be presented in the Post-Questionnaire section of the Chapter 4.

### **Post-questionnaire.**

#### **Question 1: Would you like to continue learning about academic English writing?**

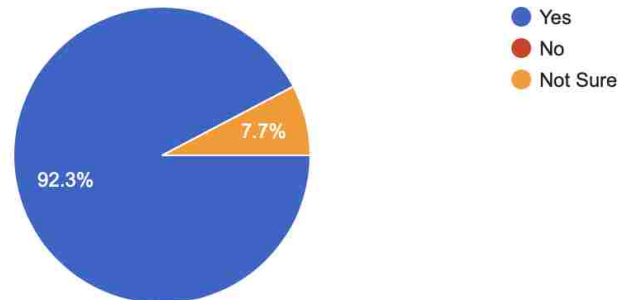


*Figure 26.* Willingness to continue learning about academic English writing

As it is seen from Figure 26 above, the majority of the students (92,3%) would like to continue learning about academic English writing, and none of the students responded negatively to this question.



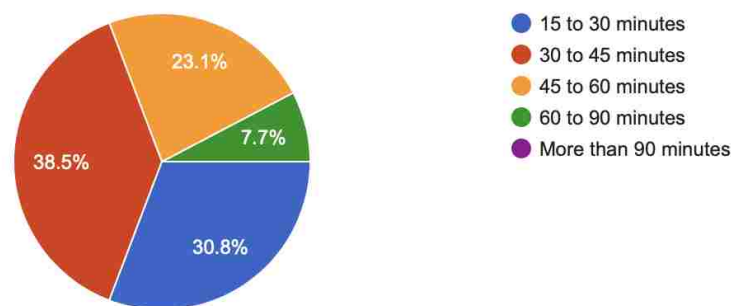
**Question 2: Would you like to participate in another online academic English writing class experience?**



*Figure 27.* Willingness to participate in another online academic English writing class

The majority of the students (92.3%) also reported that they would like to continue their experience with online academic English writing classes, and none of the students responded negatively to the question.

**Question 3: How much time per day did you spend on homework in this academic English writing course?**



*Figure 28.* Time spent on homework per day

Figure 28 presents that the amount of time the participants spent on their homework during the course vary greatly. 38.5% of the participants indicated that they spent 30 to 45 minutes per day, 30.8% spent 15 to 30 minutes per day, 23.1% indicated that the course homework took 45 to 60 minutes to complete, and 7.7% spent 60 to 90 minutes on homework

per day. None of the participants spent more than 90 minutes per day on the course assignments. It is important to note that the course assignments were designed from the perspective that the participants had their university assignments to complete.

**Question 4: Please rate your online learning experiences in the two-week academic English writing course: COURSE READINGS.**

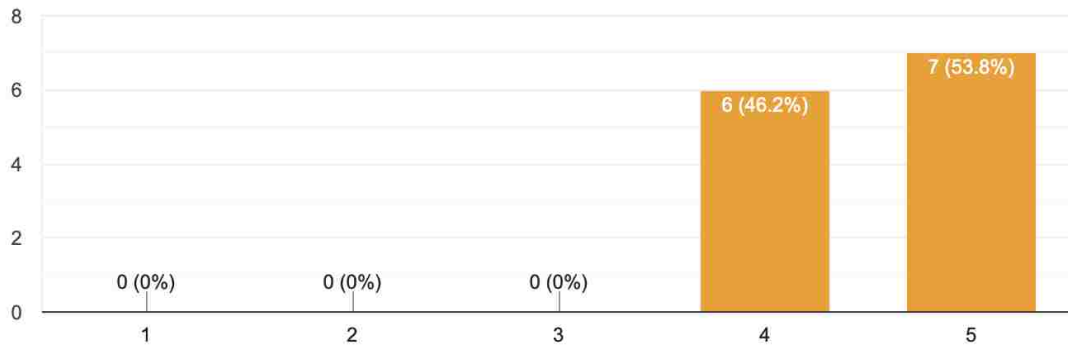


Figure 29. Experience with the course readings

**Question 5: Please rate your online learning experiences in the two-week academic English writing course: VIDEOS.**

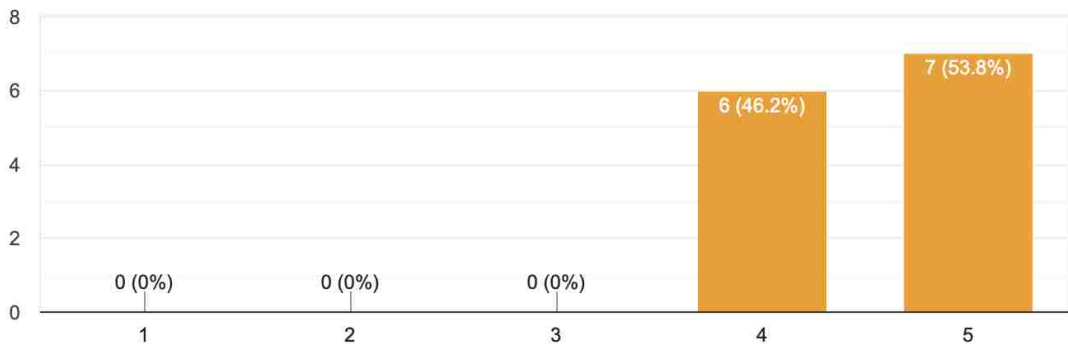
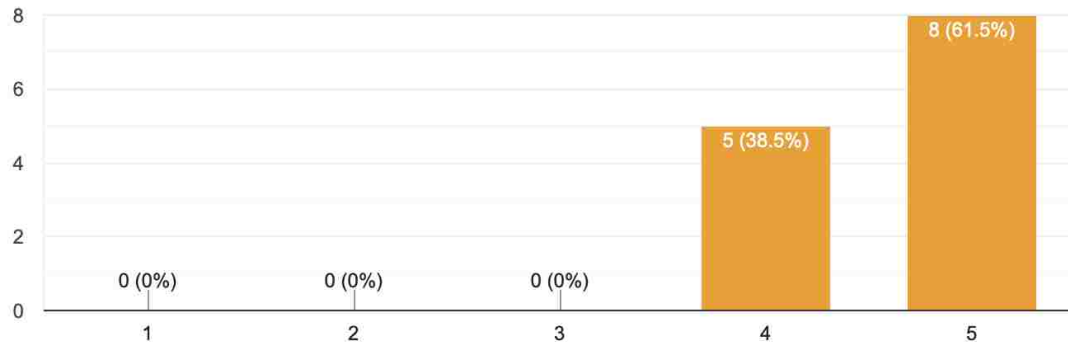


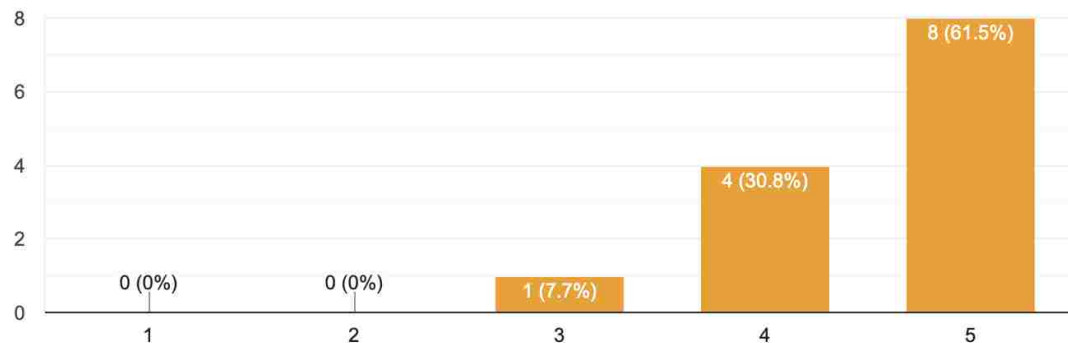
Figure 30. Experience with the course readings

**Question 6: Please rate your online learning experiences in the two-week academic English writing course: REFLECTION JOURNALS.**



*Figure 31.* Experience with the course reflection journals

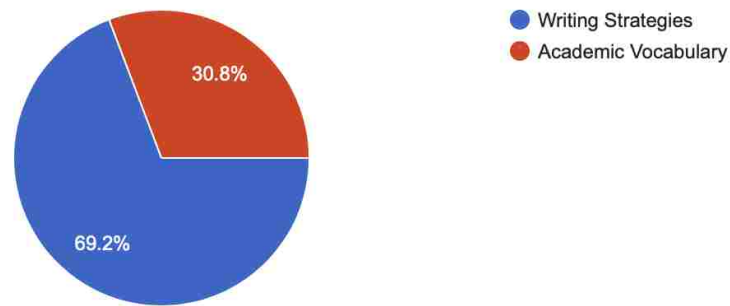
**Question 7: Please rate your online learning experiences in the two-week academic English writing course: PEER INTERACTION.**



*Figure 32.* Experience with the course peer interaction

Figures 29-32 show that the course activities were highly rated by the participants of the course. Course readings, videos, and reflection journals evaluated only as “very important” and “extremely important”. Peer interaction and reflection journals received the highest evaluation (61.5%) among the participants; however, 7.7% of the participants ranked peer interaction as “moderately important”.

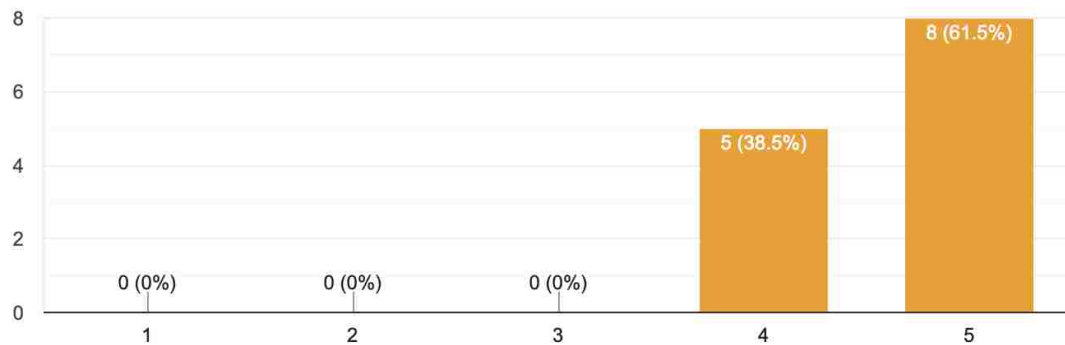
**Question 8: What are the most important writing topics in this course?**



*Figure 33.* The importance of course’s topics

69.2% of the participants considered writing strategies as the most important topic used in the course compared to 30.8% of the participants who voted for academic vocabulary.

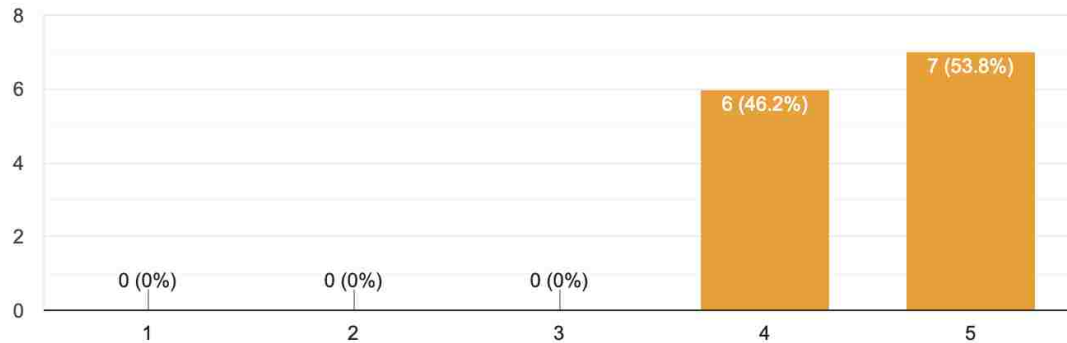
**Question 9: How satisfied were you with the content of the course?**



*Figure 34.* Course content satisfaction

All of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the content used in the course. 38.5% indicated that they were “very satisfied” and 61.5% of the participants noted that they were “extremely satisfied” with the course content.

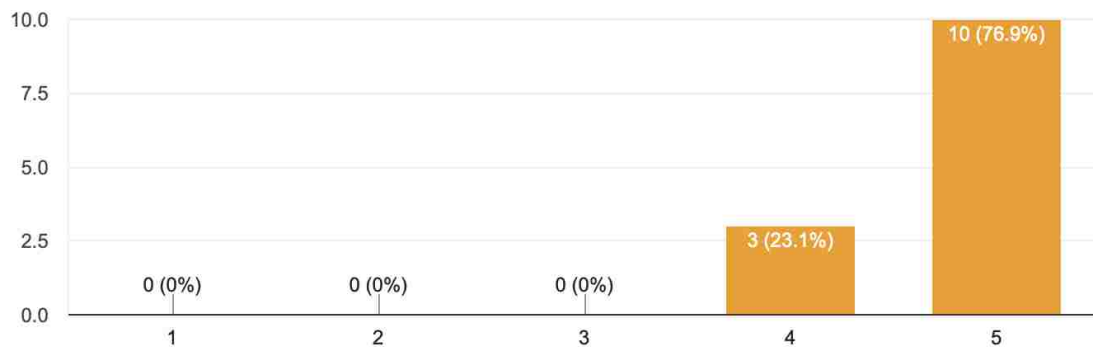
**Question 10: How engaged were you in the course activities?**



*Figure 35. Course activities engagement*

Data from Figure 35 presents the participants’ level of engagement during the course. All the participants expressed high level of engagement during the course. The majority of the participants (53.8%) indicated that they were “extremely engaged”, and 46.2% indicated they were “very engaged”.

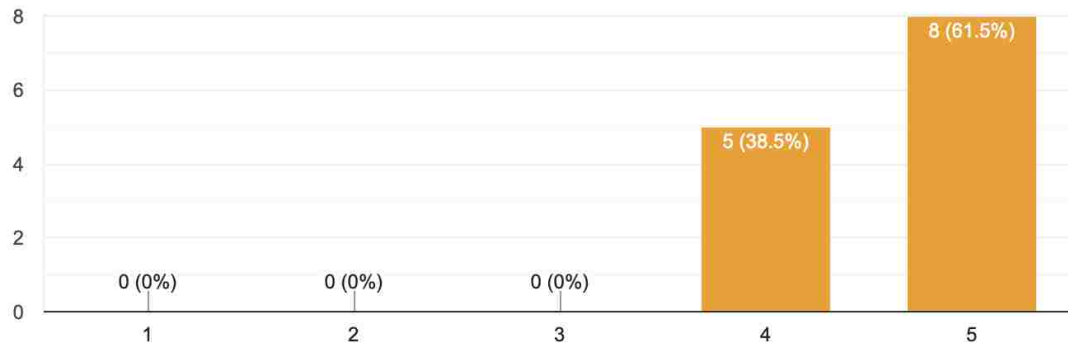
**Question 11: How would you describe your experience with the Google Platform in this course?**



*Figure 36. Experiences with the Google Platform*

The experience with the Google Platform was evaluated very positively. 76.9% of the participants noted that they were “extremely satisfied” with the use of technology.

**Question 12: How would you describe your satisfaction with peer interaction in the course?**

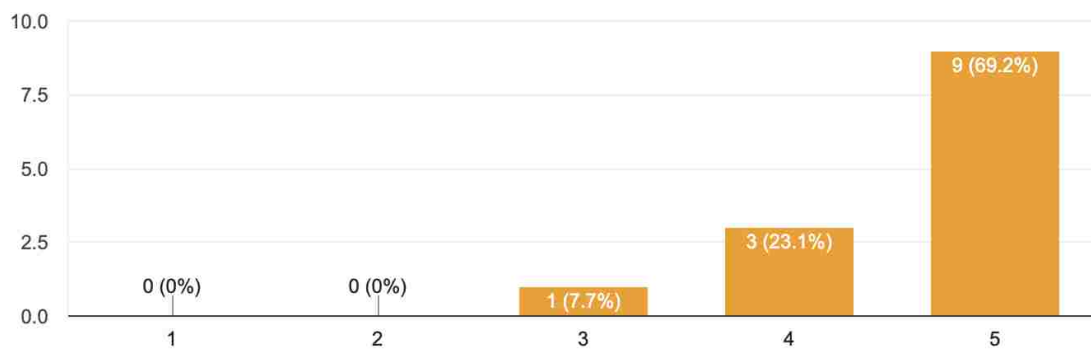


*Figure 37. Satisfaction with peer interaction*

Peer interaction was also highly evaluated by the course participants.

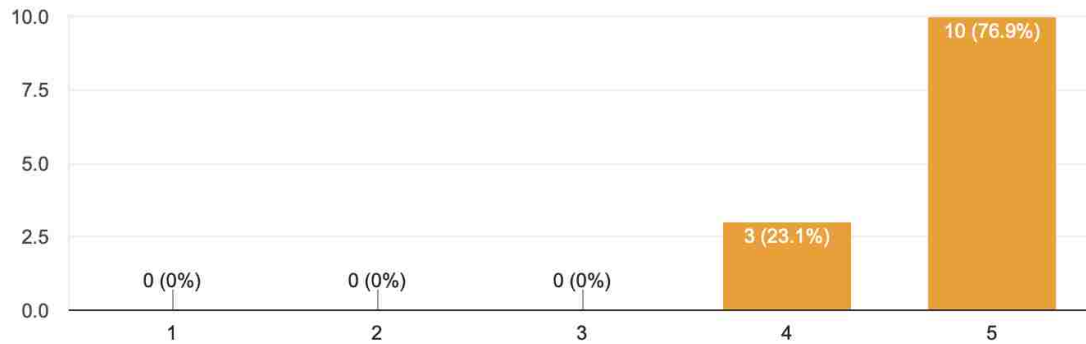
**Question 13: Rate the level of support you received from the course instructor:**

**TECHNICAL SUPPORT (such as navigating through the course on the Google Platform).**



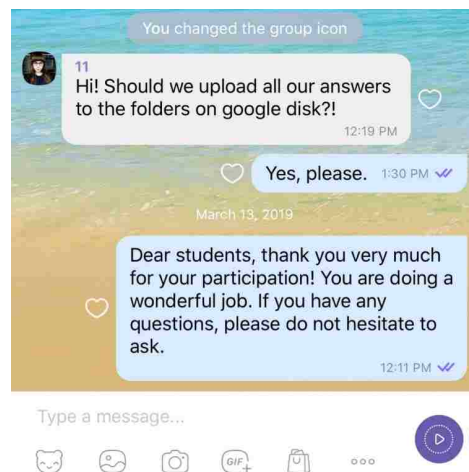
*Figure 38. Technical support satisfaction*

**Question 14: Rate the level of support you received from the course instructor: CONTENT SUPPORT (such as assignment explanations, answers to your questions about the course topics).**



*Figure 39.* Content support satisfaction

Figures 38 and 39 show the participants’ level of satisfaction with the support offered during the course. 69.2% of the participants indicated they were “extremely satisfied” with the technical support offered during the course. However, as seen in Figure 36, 10 of the 13 participants felt very comfortable with the technology. This data can also be supported by the number of questions asked in a Viber (one of the messenger types) concerning the course navigation (see Picture 1).



*Picture 1.* Online Academic Writing Course – Viber Group

**Question 15: Would you recommend this course to a fellow student?**

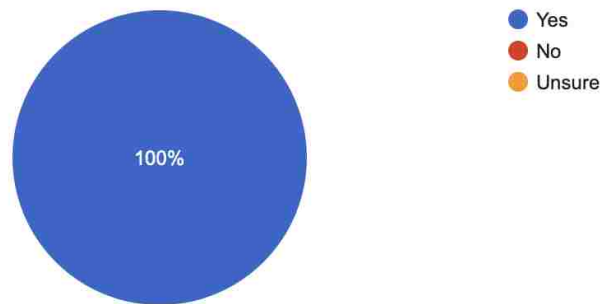


Figure 40. Willingness to recommend the course to a fellow student

One of the most important findings are presented in Figure 40. All of the participants (100%) indicated that they would recommend the course to a fellow student. None of the students voted ‘no’ or ‘unsure’.

**Question 16: Is there anything else you would like to share about this course?**

Students’ responses:

*Thank you very much!*

*Thank you for the course!*

*I believe it is important to have such courses to develop one’s language.*

*It was my first experience of participating in an online course and I enjoyed it very much.*

*What is more, I am glad it was a course in academic writing because traditional courses of English for Russian learners do not include much information about academic writing and very little practice of writing academic papers.*

*It was very useful and informative.*

*This course will be really useful for me in my future work and scientific research.*

*No.*

*This online course was a new experience for me and helped me to learn important things.*

*This course has enabled me to show my possibilities in academic writing.*

*It was a very good course. Thank you!*

*Great course!*

*Thank you very much.*

*I would add more topics to the course.*

Students’ responses demonstrate that participants evaluated the course positively. Only one of the students did not provide any additional comments about the course, and one person



suggested adding more topics to the course. Other response expressed the participants' appreciation of the course. No negative comments were received about the course.

The data collected from the Post-Questionnaire allows to answer Research Question 1 (What are the students' perceptions towards an online academic English writing course before and after?) fully. The results suggest that the participants highly evaluated the course content, assignments, and support provided. The majority of the students (92.3%) expressed their willingness to continue learning about academic English writing and to participate in another online class. Besides, all of the participants indicated that they would recommend the course they took to a fellow student.

Research Questions 2 and 3 will be further answered in Chapter 4.

## **Interviews**

A total of five interviews (three individual interviews, one group interview, and one interview with the instructor) were scheduled on Monday March 25, 2019. The interviews were conducted individually, via Skype; however, I did not use the video option because the participants asked if it would be possible to conduct the interview without the video. The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder from a hand-held device, and transcribed. After the transcriptions were completed the recordings were deleted.

### **Individual interviews.**

Three participants volunteered to take part in an individual interview. The individual interviews lasted no longer than ten minutes. All the answers were quite short; however, all the interview questions were answered completely.

Data gathered from the individual interviews and group interviews helped answer the Research Question 2 (*How will students' attitudes towards an online academic English writing*

course change by the end of the study?). Overall, the participants felt as they needed such courses as they did before the study; however, after the study, they were able to identify what aspects of writing, what tasks, and what ways of assessment were the most beneficial for them.

According to the participants, one of the most typical writing assignments they have in their university course work are essays, compositions, and short reports. One of the participants mentioned writing research papers.

***Student 3***

*Well, we write. We do some surveys, some research work on some topics, and we describe it in a way, and we also write some essays, and so on.*

All of the interviewees highly evaluated their writing in both native Russian and English. One of the students mentioned that she feels more comfortable writing in English than in Russian. Besides, all three participants indicated that they tried to do their best in the course and learned new information about academic writing in English.

Interview Themes

***Theme 1. Satisfaction with Instructional Delivery.*** The participants were satisfied with the provided instruction. There was only one question connected to the course. The participants' responses were the following:

***Student 1***

*I am completely satisfied with all the instructions because they gave me a full image of how to fill or how to do this course.*

***Student 2***

*I am really satisfied with the instructions because they gave me the full image of what I have to do.*

***Student 3***

*The instructions were given quite all right. They were clear, and everything was understood correctly. I did not have to ask the author of this course any questions.*

**Theme 2. Nominalization and E-Mail Writing.** According to the students, the most useful readings and assignments of the course were readings about nominalization and email writing. Two of the three students mentioned these assignments in their responses.

**Student 2**

*What is more, we learned what such term as nominalization means and how to avoid them in the paper works to clarify the writing.*

**Student 5**

*But my favorite task during this course was writing e-mails to other students. It helped me understand problems referring to academic writing; I discussed several topics which used to be unknown to me and it made me interested in continuing my study of this subject. But most importantly I believe it helped my knowledge of English as I had to write letters to other people using grammatical constructions, remembering the structure of the letter and importance of being polite to my interlocutor.*

None of the interviewees indicated any least useful assignments in the course. Two of the participants indicated that the course was beneficial for them as they were writing a paper for another class at the same time they were completing an online academic writing class. The third interviewee considered information about linking words and structure of a professional email beneficial to her. These findings also relate to the theory of social constructivism that was used as methodological framework for this study. Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2010) note that ‘since most of our activities are moving online nowadays, it is essential to understand how to communicate and collaborate with others effectively in an online environment’ (p. 10).

**Theme 3: Positive Attitudes about Online Learning.** The interviewees’ attitudes towards online learning were extremely positive, and two of them mentioned that having skills of online learning is significant in modern world. However, one of the participants would rather prefer a blended type of learning rather than online only. Group work in the online class was also highly evaluated by the interviewees. According to the theory of social constructivist, learning takes place in a community. Online group work activities can enhance the learning process through

joint participation, communication, and collaboration (Deulen, 2013). Jagannathan and Blair (2013) also looked at the ways to better engagement in distance education and what factors influence students' decisions. The following research also supports the need for active student engagement, faculty and peer mentoring programs, motivation, support systems, interactivity, and one more feature, authentic learning. The last means the use of meaningful real-life situations. Thus, distance learning should provide focus on real-world applications, give students an opportunity to learn by doing and to interact socially.

***Student 1***

*I think there are benefits from working with others online because I can see what are the other people are think, and how they write all these paper works, and compare them, and find maybe some useful information for myself.*

***Student 2***

*Yes, I think there are benefits because sometimes people just can't meet at one place, at one time and speaking of online can be a way out.*

***Student 3***

*I think that group work assignments are very useful because we can see what others participants do, and what they are involved into, and how they think, and I can probably see my mistakes and some other mistakes too.*

The last comment supports one of the features of formative assessment that was especially important to this study. Group work assignments and students' daily reflections were not only used to assess students work, but also to develop students' critical and self-assessment skills (Miedijensky, 2016).

Finally, all of the interviewees indicated that there was nothing to improve in the course, and no additional comment were provided either.

**Group interview.**

At the beginning of the study, conducting a focus group interview with at least three participants was planned. However, only two of the participants agreed to participate in a focus

group interview. The level of engagement between the interviewees was not very high, and most of the time the students answered the questions one after another, sometimes expressing agreement with the previous speaker. Such low level of engagement between the interviewees could be explained by the non-native language used to conduct the interview or by the small number of people participating. Nevertheless, the data gathered from the group interview fully supported the data gathered from individual interviews. The participants expressed their appreciation of the course and positive attitudes towards online learning and learning about academic writing in English. One additional comment related to the ways to improve the course gathered from the group interview was the following:

***Student 4***

*I think the creator of the course did a good job, all the tasks were useful, and maybe more written tasks could be added, but for me it was enough to do all these tasks, and I feel really satisfied with the result.*

***Student 5***

*Maybe in this course, in future maybe, add more videos and instructions, but it was enough and good for us to do it this course.*

In sum, even though the group interview was not conducted the way it was planned at the beginning, the data gathered from the group interview supported the data from the individual interviews and pre- and post-questionnaires about students' positive attitudes towards the online academic English writing course offered within this study. Furthermore, the group interview helped to reveal students' recommendations such as to increase the number of writing assignments and to add more videos that can be used to improve the course in the future.

**Teacher interview.**

The teacher interview was used to answer the Research Question 3 (*What are the teacher's perceptions on teaching a two-week online academic English writing module?*).

The university professor who agreed to manage the course has been teaching English and Linguistics at Kursk State University for 25 years. Even though she had so many years of teaching experience, this was her first experience of teaching an online academic English writing course. According to her words, the Department of Foreign Languages has a similar on-campus academic writing English course for the master students, but it contains only a few hours of instruction. Before this course, the professor had very little knowledge of teaching academic writing.

The professor indicated that students' motivation was quite good during the course. However, some students demonstrated more motivation than others, but she saw that as a natural individual learning factor. In addition, the students' interests and motivation on some of the tasks, such as watching videos, seemed higher than reading articles about academic writing. One of the reasons of why videos were highly rated in this course was that 'adding pictures, diagrams, or other similar representations to text produces enhanced learning compared to text alone' (Miller, 2014, p. 153). The videos that were used in this course were similar to short lectures that also summarized the main points of the topics in simple, concise sentences along with the video and audio support.

The professor's general comments about the benefits of the course for the students was the following:

*I think it was really beneficial because for most of them it was their first experience with an online English course, and more than that, the curriculum that we use here does allow students to have a lot of practice in writing in general. They have very little theoretical knowledge about it and they have very little practice. And I think from that course they learned a lot of interesting things. They learned the main points of the structure of a written text, its coherence for example, they learned the vocabulary, which can be used to make the text coherent, they learned the rules of writing official and semi-official emails using academic style. So, lots of things.*

The professor did not mention any of the course materials that were not useful. However, she noted that the best part was practical writing tasks such as writing answers to the questions, responses, and emails. She also indicated that there were some challenges connected to the use of technology during the course, even though none of the students mentioned technical issues in the post-questionnaire or interviews. Volungeviciene and Leduc (2006) explain that such issues might arise even with students who grew up with technology. Even though the millennials feel very comfortable with technology, they are not always acquainted how it can be used for educational purposes. They can often be proficient users of social networks but have difficulties with platforms and programs used in education.

The professors' final response about her perceptions of the course and future improvements was the following:

*That was the first time as I have said when I taught an online class. And I also learned how to arrange it technically, what kind of assignments can be used. So, I have got to know the students' reactions to the online course. And that was a great experience, and I think that it will help me to continue using online teaching. A two-week course is as good as it is, but I would. If we had more time, I would expand it, and I would add more hours, add more topics starting from the easiest samples of writing and coming to something bigger, for example giving students a task to write an article on the topic they are researching. Something like that. So, I would make it longer and would add more topics. But for a two-week course it was all right.*

Thus, the data gathered from the final interview with the university professor shows that the suggested online course was the first experience for both the professor and the students. The professor admitted that there were obvious benefits gained from the course. She had positive attitudes towards the proposed course and would like to continue teaching such courses in future.

## **Reflections**

One of the course assignments was to write a reflection after the course completion. The number of students who participated in the course was 13; however, the number of reflections

posted at the end was 11. Two of the students decided not to write their reflections due to unknown reasons. Three randomly selected reflections can be found in the Appendix M. There were no significant differences in the participants' responses; however, random sample selection help eliminate bias in research (Bauer, 2014).

**Theme 1. Positive Perceptions.** All of the participants expressed positive attitudes toward the online academic English writing course offered within this study. Here is a short fragment of one of the students' reflections (Reflection Journal #4):

*I was very interested in taking part in this online-course of academic English writing and I don't regret that I have decided to participate in it. When I started it I was a little bit puzzled, because it seemed difficult. But as it is well organized, it didn't take me much time to understand the way we should work. There are many interesting and different exercises in this course. It consisted of not only practical but also theoretical tasks. First of all we got acquainted with the academic English writing in general. We watched videos, read some chapters from different books. We also learned what cohesion is and use this knowledge in practice. Then the members of the course are to write several emails and answer to our groupmates. There some more theoretical tasks were given. Every task we are download on Google Disk.*

This theme answers **Research Question 2** (*How will students' attitudes towards an online academic English writing course change by the end of the study?*). The students' attitudes towards the academic English writing course became even more positive. The pre-questionnaire did not reveal any negative attitudes towards the course; however, it showed that the students had never had an online class of any type before participating in the study. The data gathered from the post-questionnaire, reflections, and interviews indicate that students feel positive and express high appreciation of the suggested course.

**Theme 2. Interest in participating in another online academic English writing course in the future.** All of the participants mentioned in their reflections that they would like to continue learning about academic English writing through online education (Reflection Journal #4).



*In conclusion, I would like to say that this online course was really useful for me and I got a huge amount of information. Also, I understand that online course can be very interesting, and I would like to take part in some other online course.*

**Theme 3. Increased self-confidence.** All of the students stated that they did not have any experience with online classes, and the majority of the participants (n=7) indicated that they expected challenges at the beginning of the course.

*When I started this program, I was worried I would not be able to do an online course. This is the first online course that I've ever taken, and it is unusual for me to study through to internet.*

All of the themes mentioned above reflect the main features of the social constructivism theory: group activities and access to peers' work helped increase students' self-confidence as they had an opportunity to learn from each other. Increased self-confidence influenced students' engagement in the course that led to positive perceptions of the course and willingness to continue learning about academic English writing in an online setting (Philpott and Batty, 2009).

## **Summary**

**The following research questions were the purpose of conducting this study:**

- What are the students' perceptions towards an online academic English writing course before and after?
- How will students' attitudes towards an online academic English writing course change by the end of the study?
- What are the teacher's perceptions on teaching a two-week online academic English writing module?

The students' perceptions were positive toward an online academic English writing course before and after the course; however, before this course the students did not have any

online classes and classes on academic English writing. After taking the course, the participants' willingness to continue online academic English writing increased. The instructor's perceptions on the online academic English writing course were also positive. The instructor pointed out significant benefits for her and how the students gained knowledge and practical applications from the course. Chapter 5 will delineate the limitations for the current study and makes recommendations for improved practice and future research.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

To explore the research questions, I created a two-week online academic English writing course, conducted a training for a university professor who agreed to manage the course at Kursk State University, Russia, analyzed students' reflections about the course and the pre- and post-questionnaires results, and conducted five interviews. This Chapter presents a summary of the study methodology and a discussion of the findings. It also discusses the relevance of the study, delineates the limitations for the current study, and makes recommendations for improved practice and future research.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

All of the participants of the study indicated that they had positive attitudes towards the online academic English writing course and expressed their willingness to continue learning about academic English writing, and twelve of the thirteen participants were eager to expand their experience with online classes. Eleven of the participants supported their survey responses with their reflections about the course. The university professor, who has taught for 25 years, noted that it was her first experience with online teaching. The professor also stated that such types of courses are beneficial for both teachers and students.

#### **Limitations**

Because this study involved a case study with a specific location and small sample size, it's important not to draw unwarranted inferences. This study was also limited by a short duration of time. Another limitation of the study is that all of the participants of the study were female. The study conducted by Abramo et al. (2018) registered that women showed a greater capacity to collaborate in all forms analyzed in the study. Pre- and post-questionnaires and the

developed course were not pilot tested for reliability and validity. A longer study with a larger sample size and inclusion of male and female students is needed to see the true conclusions of this study. It would also be beneficial to pilot test the questionnaires and the developed course.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings from the study, the following are recommendations for further research.

- **Provide a short technical training before the participation for all participants.**

Even though the data gathered from pre- and post-questionnaires and interviews did not indicate any problems with the technical side of the online course, some of the students noted in their reflections that the course and navigation in the course seemed difficult at the very beginning. A short training session would be beneficial for scaffolding students' positive experience with the course.

- **Expand the duration of the course and the number of topics covered.**

The professor and some of the students mentioned that would like the course to be longer and contain more topics starting from the basics and ending with the task to write an actual research paper.

- **Use more videos.**

The professor and several of the students that they were more interested in watching videos than reading the book chapters and articles chosen for the course. According to Miller (2014), videos help create emotional connection to what is being learned, and students remember the material better.

- **Increase practical tasks.**

One of the students' favorite assignments used in the course was to write each other professional emails and respond to them. Mbat (2013) suggests that practical tasks stimulate constructivism and observational learning in online learning programs.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to investigate Russian University EFL Students' perceptions of a two-week online academic writing course to present the findings that such courses are needed to be embedded in Russian universities' curriculum. Previous research shows that online academic English classes are not commonly used in in Russian university curriculums; however, many researchers state that English academic writing skills have significant importance for students who want to continue their studying abroad or work in academia. This research findings indicate that the students who participated in the study have positive perceptions towards the proposed course and consider it beneficial for the current studies and future professional development. Thus, the research findings can be used to further investigate the topic and support the introduction of such courses in the Russian university curricula in the future.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix A. Expedited Approval Letter



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**To:** Natalia Alekseevna Borozdina  
**From:** Douglas James Adams, Chair  
IRB Committee  
**Date:** 03/05/2019  
**Action:** **Expedited Approval**  
**Action Date:** 03/05/2019  
**Protocol #:** 1812163474  
**Study Title:** Russian University Students' Perceptions of a Two-Week Online EFL Academic Writing Course  
**Expiration Date:** 02/10/2020  
**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Tina Howlett, Investigator

## Appendix B. Instructor Consent to Participate in a Research Study



### Instructor Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Principal Researcher: Nataliia Borozdina

Faculty Advisor: Kristina M. Howlett, Ph.D.

**Introduction:** You are invited to participate in a research study about students' perceptions and attitudes of a two-week online EFL academic writing course. It is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you are being asked to do.

**Title of Research Project:** Russian University Student Perceptions of a Two-Week Online EFL Academic Writing Course

#### Principal Researcher

Nataliia Borozdina  
Student in M.Ed. TESOL  
The University of Arkansas  
College of Education  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
naborozd@uark.edu

#### Faculty Advisor

Kristina Marie Howlett, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of TESOL  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
University of Arkansas  
Peabody Hall 116  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
khowlett@uark.edu  
+1(479) 575-7517 (Office)

**The purpose of this study** is to investigate Russian university students' attitudes and perceptions about a two-week online EFL academic writing course.

#### Procedures:

You are being asked for your permission to:

1. Manage a two-week extracurricular online EFL academic writing course.
2. Participate in a 20-30 minute videotaped interview about your experience managing a two-week extracurricular online EFL academic writing course.

**Possible Benefits and Risks or Discomforts of the Research:** You will receive a certificate of participation in the study after the two-week course is complete. There are no risks to participating. There will be no cost associated with your participation. You will not receive compensation for your time and inconvenience if you choose to participate in this study.

**Right to Withdraw:** If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study.

**Confidentiality:** All data will be locked in a secure area. The video recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

**Questions about the Research:** You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher, Nataliia Borozdina by email (naborozd@uark.edu) for any concerns that you may have. You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP  
Institutional Review Board Coordinator  
Research Compliance  
University of Arkansas  
109 MLKG Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201  
479-575-2208  
irb@uark.edu

**Informed Consent:**

- I agree to manage a two-week academic online writing course.
- I agree to be interviewed and be videotaped during the interview.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (please print),  
have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C. Student Consent to Participate in a Research Study



### Student Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Principal Researcher: Nataliia Borozdina  
Faculty Advisor: Kristina M. Howlett, Ph.D.

**Introduction:** You are invited to participate in a research study about students' perceptions and attitudes of a two-week academic online writing course. It is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you are being asked to do.

**Title of Research Project:** *Russian University Students' Perceptions of a Two-Week Online EFL Academic Writing Course*

#### Principal Researcher

Nataliia Borozdina  
Student in M.Ed. TESOL  
The University of Arkansas  
College of Education  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
naborozd@uark.edu



#### Faculty Advisor

Kristina Marie Howlett, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of TESOL  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
University of Arkansas  
Peabody Hall 116  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
khowlett@uark.edu  
+1(479) 575-7517 (Office)

**The purpose of this study** is to investigate students' attitudes and perceptions of a two-week online EFL academic writing course.

#### Procedures:

You are being asked for your permission to:

1. Participate in a two-week extracurricular online EFL academic writing course.
2. Complete a pre- and post-questionnaire. Each questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.
3. You may be asked to participate in a 20-30-minute videotaped interview about your learning experience in a two-week extracurricular online EFL academic writing course.
4. You may be asked to participate in a 15-minute videotaped focus group interview.

**Possible Benefits and Risks or Discomforts of the Research:** You will receive knowledge about academic English writing and a certificate of participation in the study after the two-week course is complete. There are no risks to participating. There will be no cost associated with your participation. You will not receive compensation for your time and inconvenience if you choose to participate in this study.

**Right to Withdraw:** If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study. Your grade and your relationship with the instructor and the University will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

**Confidentiality:** All data will be locked in a secure area. The video recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

**Questions about the Research:** You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher, Nataliia Borozdina by email (naborozd@uark.edu) for any concerns that you may have. You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP  
Institutional Review Board Coordinator  
Research Compliance  
University of Arkansas  
109 MLKG Building  
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201  
479-575-2208  
irb@uark.edu

**Informed Consent:**

- I agree to participate in a two-week academic online writing course.
- I agree to complete pre- and post- questionnaires.
- I agree to be interviewed and be videotaped during the interview if asked.
- I agree to be interviewed and videotaped for a focus group interview if asked.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (please print),  
have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Appendix D. Participation Invitation Flyer



### Participation Invitation Flyer

**Dear Invitee,**

My name is Nataliia Borozdina. I am an M.Ed. TESOL student at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, USA. I am kindly requesting your participation in a master research study that I am conducting entitled: *Russian University Students' Perceptions of a Two-Week Online EFL Academic Writing Course*. The intention is to assess students' perceptions and attitudes toward a proposed two-week online academic writing course.

The study involves completing a two-week online academic English writing course, pre- and post-questionnaires, and participation in an individual and group interview. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is completely anonymous; therefore, your name and identifying information will be removed from the study and replaced with a pseudonym.

If you are interested to participate in the study, please send an e-mail message with your consent to participate to the Principal Researcher, Natalia Borozdina at [naborozd@uark.edu](mailto:naborozd@uark.edu) or contact your English course instructor. You may contact the Principal Researcher, Nataliia Borozdina, by email ([naborozd@uark.edu](mailto:naborozd@uark.edu)), if you have any questions about the study.

Thank you for your time and participation.

**Sincerely,**

**Nataliia Borozdina, M.Ed. TESOL Student**

**University of Arkansas**

## Appendix E. Permission to Conduct Study

### Permission to Conduct Study

Dear Ms. X:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently enrolled in the M.Ed. TESOL program at the University of Arkansas, AR, and am in the process of writing my master's thesis. The study is entitled: *Russian University Students' Perceptions of a Two-Week Online EFL Academic Writing Course*.

I am requesting your consent to allow me to recruit students you are currently teaching to participate in a two-week online academic English writing course, pre- and post-questionnaires, and interviews. Interested students, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed and returned to me, the primary researcher, at the beginning of the study (copy enclosed).

Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your department or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address: [naborozd@uark.edu](mailto:naborozd@uark.edu).

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form to [naborozd@uark.edu](mailto:naborozd@uark.edu).

**Sincerely,**

**Nataliia Borozdina, MEd TESOL Student**

**University of Arkansas**

Approved by:

---

Name (Print)	Title	Signature	Date
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## Appendix F. Instructor Interview Protocol

I am asking you to participate in an interview. Your participation will help me understand your experiences connected with the two-week academic English writing course you completed. The interview will take about 20 minutes. Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

1. Please introduce yourself and tell about your professional teaching experience.
2. Prior to teaching the online academic English writing course, had you had any online learning experiences? If yes, please describe.
3. Describe your prior experiences teaching academic English.
4. How would you describe your experiences teaching this course?
5. How would you rate your knowledge about teaching academic writing?
6. What types of assignments did you provide to keep students on task?
7. How would you describe the students' motivation in this course? Were some students more motivated than others? If yes, could you provide an example? Why do you think some students were more motivated than others?
8. How do you think this course was beneficial for your students? Could you provide an example?
9. Which course materials do you believe were the most beneficial? Why?
10. Which course materials do you believe were the least beneficial? Why?
11. Which assignments do you believe were the most beneficial? Why?
12. Which assignments do you believe were least beneficial? Why?
13. What types of challenges did you face in teaching the online academic writing course?
14. What were your successes?
15. If you were to teach this course again, what would be some ways to improve the course?
16. Do you have any other information to share about the online academic English writing course?
17. Do you have any questions for me?

## Appendix G. Group Interview Protocol

I am asking you to participate in a group interview. Your participation will help me understand your experiences in the two-week academic English writing course. The interview will take about 20-30 minutes. Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

1. How would you describe a person that sits next to you?
2. How would you rate your satisfaction with the instruction you received in the academic English writing course?
3. How would you rate your participation in this course?
4. Are you satisfied with your level and quality of participation? If yes, could you provide an example? If you were not satisfied, what do you feel prevented you from participating to a greater degree?
5. Which were the most useful readings and assignments in the course?
6. Which were the least useful readings and assignments in the course?
7. Do you feel as if there were any benefits gained from participating in this course? If so, please describe.
8. Do you feel that you learn more in a face-to-face classroom setting or do you prefer the autonomy of “going to the online class” when it is convenient for you and making your own schedule to complete the required assignments?
9. If you were to enroll in this 2-week online academic English writing course again, are there any online support features that you believe would improve your writing?
10. What makes group work successful?
11. What makes group work unsuccessful?
12. How would you rate your participation in the group work assignments?
13. Do you believe that there are benefits from working with others online? If yes, please describe the benefits.
14. What do you believe could be an improvement in the course?
15. Do you feel this course has practical value in your life? If yes, please explain.
16. Where will you apply this knowledge about academic writing?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix H. Student Interview Protocol

I am asking you to participate in an interview. Your participation will help me understand your experiences in the two-week academic English writing course. The interview will take about 20 minutes. Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What types of writing assignments do you usually have in your university course work?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 as not at all confident and 5 extremely confident, how confident do you feel about writing in your native language?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 as not at all confident and 5 extremely confident, how confident do you feel about writing in English?
5. How would you rate your satisfaction with the instruction you received in the academic English writing course?
6. How would you rate your participation in this course?
7. Are you satisfied with your level and quality of participation? If yes, could you provide an example? If you were not satisfied, what do you feel prevented you from participating to a greater degree?
8. Which were the most useful readings and assignments in the course?
9. Which were the least useful readings and assignments in the course?
10. Do you feel as if there were any benefits gained from participating in this course? If so, please describe.
11. Do you feel that you learn more in a face-to-face classroom setting or do you prefer the autonomy of “going to the online class” when it is convenient for you and making your own schedule to complete the required assignments?
12. If you were to enroll in this 2-week online academic English writing course again, are there any online support features that you believe would improve your writing?
13. How would you rate your participation in the group work assignments?
14. Do you believe that there are benefits from working with others online? If yes, please describe the benefits.
15. What do you believe could be an improvement in the course?
16. Do you feel this course has practical value in your life? If yes, please explain.
17. Where will you apply this knowledge about academic writing?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix I. Course Syllabus



### SYLLABUS

**Research Project Title:** Russian University EFL Students' Perceptions about a Two-Week Online Academic Writing Course

**Course Title:** Academic English Writing

**Course Duration:** Two Weeks

#### **General Information:**

##### **Principal Researcher**

Nataliia Borozdina

Student in M.Ed. TESOL

The University of Arkansas

College of Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

naborozd@uark.edu



#### **Description and Objectives for the Course:**

The two-week online academic writing course will introduce students to the practice of writing English for academic purposes. It will be a good first step in preparing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students for work in a high level English academic environment in which research writing is a requirement.

#### **Course Objectives:**

On successful completion of the course, the students will be able to:

1. Become familiar with what academic writing is, its general characteristics, and why it is important by watching 'An Introduction to Academic Writing' by John Kotnarowski.
2. Describe cohesion in academic writing by revising a paper 'Tell a Good Story Well: Writing Tips' by Randolph Smith.
3. Plan and structure an academic email message; learn which standards to follow, what abbreviations are acceptable, and how to write personal comments.
4. Become familiar with nominalization, why it is better to use verbs, and how to avoid nominalization in one's writing.
5. Acquire knowledge about the old-to-new information flow is and why it is a good writing strategy.
6. Identify the key features of a reflection paper, which questions to consider when writing a reflection paper, how to write it, and what strategies they can use.

## Appendix J. Academic English Writing Course Schedule

<b>Week 1</b>		
<p><b>Along with the course activities and assignments you are asked to write a short (8-12 sentences) reflections (your thoughts) about the course content and activities (what you learned, what you liked and disliked).</b></p> <p><b>You will need to post your journals at the end of the course.</b></p>		
Date	Content (Readings, and Videos)	Assignment Due Date
Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think ‘academic writing’ is? What qualities are necessary to become a good writer (discuss at least 3 qualities)?</li> <li>• Watch a video ‘An Introduction to Academic Writing’ by John Kotnarowski (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyTLoosz6aHA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyTLoosz6aHA</a>) and provide short responses to the following questions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is academic English?</li> <li>○ What is academic writing?</li> <li>○ What are the general characteristics of academic writing?</li> <li>○ Why is academic writing important?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Complete a pre-survey</b></li> </ul>	Complete by Tuesday
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read at least 3 of your peer responses and write comments paying attention to differences and similarities in your points of view (go to Week 1 Monday Task 1 and write your responses there).</li> <li>• Watch a video ‘An Introduction to Cohesion in Academic Writing’ by John Kotnarowski (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TScPcKfQ9ds">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TScPcKfQ9ds</a>) and provide short responses to the following questions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is cohesion?</li> <li>○ Why is it important to be cohesive?</li> <li>○ What are some ways to make one’s writing more cohesive?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Complete by Wednesday
Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read Chapter 19 ‘Good Practice with Email’ from the book Oxford Guide to Plain English by Martin Cutts.</li> <li>• Draft two emails to your peers about any academic issue you would like to discuss.</li> </ul>	Complete by Thursday
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read p. 8-9 ‘Organization’ from the book Academic Writing for Graduate Students by John Swales and Christine Freak.</li> <li>• Write two emails to your peers about any academic issue you would like to discuss.</li> </ul>	Complete by Friday

Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to your peers' emails (Take screenshots of your emails and your peer responses and upload them in the 'Emails' folder. Use your full name (pseudonym) to name your files).</li> </ul>	Complete by Monday
Saturday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read an article 'Tell a Good Story Well: Writing Tips' by Randolph Smith</li> </ul>	Complete by Monday
Sunday		
<b>Week 2</b>		
Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read Chapter 3 'Use Base Verbs, Not Nominalizations' from the book Plain English for Lawyers by Richard Wydick</li> <li>Watch a video 'Avoid Nominalizations' (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82MHOBvovmo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82MHOBvovmo</a>)</li> </ul>	Complete by Tuesday
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write down nominalizations from Exercise 6 (see Chapter 3 'Use Base Verbs, Not Nominalizations' from the book Plain English for Lawyers by Richard Wydick) and turn them into verbs. Add 5-10 of your own examples. Share your lists with your peers.</li> </ul>	Complete by Wednesday
Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read information on pages 31-33 'Old-to-New Information Flow' from the book Academic Writing for Graduate Students by John Swales and Christine Freak.</li> <li>Read Task 17 on pages 33-36.</li> </ul>	Complete by Thursday
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete Task 17 from the book Academic Writing for Graduate Students by John Swales and Christine Freak. Post your answers to the questions on Friday (in this assignment you will be working with a partner). Use your full names to name your files.</li> </ul>	Complete by Friday
Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read information on pages 270-272 from the book Academic Writing for Graduate Students by John Swales and Christine Freak.</li> <li>Watch a video 'Reflective Writing' (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SntBj0FIApw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SntBj0FIApw</a>)</li> <li>Watch a video 'Writing a Reflection' (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjLa2sJjla0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjLa2sJjla0</a>)</li> </ul>	Complete by Monday
Saturday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work on your reflection about the course. Your reflection should be no less that 450 words. Post your reflections (with your journals) into the '6. Saturday/Sunday' folder). Use your full name (pseudonym) to name your files.</li> <li><b>Complete a post-survey</b></li> </ul>	Complete by Monday
Sunday		



## Appendix K. Lesson Objectives

### Day 1 (Monday)

1. Students will become familiar with what academic writing is, its general characteristics, and why it is important.
2. Students will create notes based on their reading and watching assignments.
3. Students will share their views on what qualities are necessary to become a good writer.
4. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

### Day 2 (Tuesday)

1. Students will analyze their classmates' responses (necessary qualities to become a good writer).
2. Students will identify differences and similarities in their views and provide a short response.
3. Students will become familiar with what cohesion in academic writing is.
4. Students will create notes on what cohesion is, why it is important, and ways to make one's writing cohesive.
5. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

### Day 3 (Wednesday)

1. Students will become familiar how to plan and structure an email, what standards to follow, what abbreviations can be used, and how to insert their own comments.
2. Students will draft two emails to their peers using the guidelines from the readings.
3. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

### Day 4 (Thursday)

1. Students will become familiar with a detailed organization structure of an email (greeting, acknowledgement, good news, administrative matters, welcoming close).
2. Students will analyze an email using the guidelines from the readings.
3. Students will edit their email drafts relying on both reading materials.
4. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

### Day 5 (Friday)

1. Students will read their peers' emails.
2. Students will write short responses to two of their classmates' emails.
3. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

### Day 6,7 (Saturday, Sunday)

1. Students will read an article and become familiar with writing tips that can be used in academic writing.
2. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

### Day 8 (Monday)

1. Students will become familiar with what nominalization is, why it is better to use verbs, and how to avoid nominalization in one's writing.
2. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

#### **Day 9 (Tuesday)**

1. Students will identify nominalization in a text and turn the words into verbs.
2. Students will offer their own examples of nominalization and the verbs that can be created from them.
3. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

#### **Day 10 (Wednesday)**

1. Students will learn what the old-to-new information flow is and why it is a good writing strategy.
2. Students will read the questions and examples in the task and think about ways to better approach the task.
3. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

#### **Day 11 (Thursday)**

1. Students will discuss the questions in pairs.
2. Students will learn to negotiate and come up with a single answer to each question.
3. Students will write their responses to the questions.
4. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

#### **Day 12 (Friday)**

1. Students will learn what a reflection paper is, what questions to consider when writing a reflection paper, how to write it, and what strategies they can use.
2. Students will write a short reflection on the lessons readings and activities.

#### **Day 13, 14 (Saturday, Sunday)**

1. Students will analyze their everyday reflection notes.
2. Students will integrate their everyday reflection notes into the reflection paper.
3. Students will write a reflection paper about the course.

## Appendix L. Rubrics

### Journal Taking Assignment

25–20: Excellent; 19–13: Good; 12–8: Satisfactory; 5–0: Poor	<b>Excellent</b> (4-5 points)	<b>Good</b> (3 points)	<b>Satisfactory</b> (2 points)	<b>Poor</b> (0 to 1 points)
<b>Knowledge/ Understanding</b>	Presents accurate information and insightful ideas	Presents accurate information and complete ideas	Presents some accurate information and some ideas	Presents incomplete or inaccurate information and ideas
<b>Thinking</b>	Expresses many ideas, supported effectively by relevant evidence or rationales	Expresses ideas supported by relevant evidence or rationales	Expresses some ideas, supported by relevant evidence or rationales	Expresses few ideas, with limited support by relevant evidence or rationales
<b>Communication</b>	Meaning and intent are clear and engaging	Meaning and intent are clear	Meaning and intent are sometimes unclear	Meaning and intent are frequently clear
<b>Application</b>	Few minor mechanical errors	Some minor mechanical errors	Some major mechanical errors	Frequent, major mechanical errors
<b>Making Connections</b>	Makes many personal connections with the topic	Makes considerable personal connections with topic	Makes some personal connections with topic	Makes few personal connections with topic

### Note Taking Assignment

20–16: Excellent; 15–12: Good; 11–6: Satisfactory; 5–0: Poor	<b>Excellent</b> (4-5 points)	<b>Good</b> (3 points)	<b>Satisfactory</b> (2 points)	<b>Poor</b> (0 to 1 points)
<b>Keywords vs. copying</b>	Notes are recorded as keywords and phrases in student's words.	Notes are primarily recorded as keywords and phrases in mostly student's words.	Notes are primarily copied from the source. Some evidence of keywords and phrases in own words.	Notes are copied directly from the source.
<b>Relevance</b>	Notes relate to the topic and show the main ideas.	Notes primarily relate to the topic, some main ideas.	Some notes relate to the topic, but many don't, few main ideas.	Notes are not related to the topic, little main ideas.
<b>Organization</b>	All notes are organized logically and effectively.	Most notes are organized with some logic, orderly and legible.	Some evidence that notes are organized, with little order, somewhat legible.	No evidence of notes that are organized, orderly or legible.

<b>Quantity</b>	Enough notes to get all relevant, key data.	A sufficient number of notes are taken.	Nearly enough notes are taken.	Not enough notes are taken.
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### Peer Response Assignment

15–10: Excellent; 9–5: Good; 4–0: Satisfactory	<b>Excellent (4-5 points)</b>	<b>Good (3 points)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (0 to 2 points)</b>
<b>Quality of information</b>	Information clearly relates to the main topic. Contributions are thoughtful and relevant to the discussion.	Information clearly relates to the main topic.	Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic or simply restates the main concepts.
<b>Participation</b>	Responds to two or more classmates and instructor. Encourages and facilitates interaction among members of the online community.	Responds to one member of the online community.	Does not or rarely offers timely or relevant responses to any member of the online community.
<b>Quality of writing and proofreading</b>	Written responses are free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing facilitates communication.	Written responses are largely free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing generally facilitates communication.	Written responses contain many grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing does not facilitate communication.

### Email Writing Assignment

20–16: Excellent; 15–12: Good; 11–6: Satisfactory; 5–0: Poor	<b>Excellent (4-5 points)</b>	<b>Good (3 points)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (2 points)</b>	<b>Poor (0 to 1 points)</b>
<b>Format &amp; Structure</b>	Clear and appropriate subject in subject line, appropriate greetings, professional email address, professional signature line.	Subject is not descriptive or inappropriate, greeting does not contain name of recipient, e-mail is unprofessional, unprofessional signature.	No subject, no greeting, no signature.	No subject, no greeting, no signature.
<b>Content</b>	Clear brief descriptive message. Thoroughly explains purpose.	Clear brief descriptive message.	Message is several paragraphs and does not get to the point quickly OR is so short it doesn't give detail.	Message does not accomplish task.
<b>Quality of writing and proofreading</b>	Written responses are free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing	Written responses are largely free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing	Written responses contain several grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing does not facilitate	Written responses contain many grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. The style of writing

	facilitates communication.	generally facilitates communication.	communication well.	does not facilitate communication.
<b>Tone</b>	Friendly, clear, descriptive.	Clear, descriptive.	Casual.	Overly casual for a formal e-mail.

### Group Work (Task 17) Assignment

20–16: Excellent; 15–12: Good; 11–6: Satisfactory; 5–0: Poor	<b>Excellent (4-5 points)</b>	<b>Good (3 points)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (2 points)</b>	<b>Poor (0 to 1 points)</b>
<b>Level of content</b>	Content indicates synthesis of ideas, in- depth analysis and evidences original thought and support for the topic.	Content indicates original thinking and develops ideas with sufficient and firm evidence.	Content indicates thinking and reasoning applied with original thought on a few ideas.	Shows some thinking and reasoning but most ideas are underdeveloped and unoriginal.
<b>Organization</b>	Writing shows high degree of attention to logic and reasoning of points.	Writing is coherent and logically organized with transitions used between ideas and paragraphs to create coherence. Overall unity of ideas is present.	Writing is coherent and logically organized. Some points remain misplaced and stray from the topic.	Writing lacks logical organization. It shows some coherence but ideas lack unity. Serious errors.
<b>Quantity</b>	All the 10 questions are correctly answered.	8-9 questions are correctly answered.	Half of the questions are correctly answered.	Nearly none of the questions are correctly answered.
<b>Quality of writing and proofreading</b>	Written responses are free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	Written responses are largely free of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	Written responses contain several grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	Written responses contain many grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.

### Reflection Paper Assignment

25–20: Excellent; 19–13: Good; 12–8: Satisfactory; 7–0: Poor	<b>Excellent (4-5 points)</b>	<b>Good (3 points)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (2 points)</b>	<b>Poor (0 to 1 points)</b>
<b>Knowledge/ Understanding</b>	Presents accurate information and insightful ideas	Presents accurate information and complete ideas	Presents some accurate information and some ideas	Presents incomplete or inaccurate information and ideas
<b>Thinking</b>	Expresses many ideas, supported effectively by relevant evidence or rationales	Expresses ideas supported by relevant evidence or rationales	Expresses some ideas, supported by relevant evidence or rationales	Expresses few ideas, with limited support by relevant evidence or rationales

<b>Communication</b>	Meaning and intent are clear and engaging	Meaning and intent are clear	Meaning and intent are sometimes unclear	Meaning and intent are frequently clear
<b>Application</b>	Few minor mechanical errors	Some minor mechanical errors	Some major mechanical errors	Frequent, major mechanical errors
<b>Making Connections</b>	Makes many personal connections with the topic	Makes considerable personal connections with topic	Makes some personal connections with topic	Makes few personal connections with topic

## **Appendix M. Students' Course Reflection Samples**

### **Student 1**

We have participated in a course in order to improve our skills in Academic Writing. It is a two-week course that consists of the theoretical part and practical tasks based on the theory. There are tasks provided for every day. First the participants are to watch some videos on the topic of Academic Writing and to write short answers to the questions asked. Then the members of the course are to write several emails and answer to our groupmates' ones. There some more theoretical tasks were given. Every task we are download on Google Disk.

While participating in this course we have learnt what Academic English exactly is and when we should use the language of academic writing. Moreover, we have learnt what cohesion is and how it influences the perception of the paperwork we are writing. We need to structure the paper, all parts of which should be connected by sense and by using linking words. What is more, we learned what such term as 'nominalisations' means and how to avoid them in the paper works to clarify the writing. Moreover, as computer technologies have been popularised recently exchanging emails with our teachers, chiefs, instructors and supervisors has become highly useful. It saves time either ours and our supervisors.

It is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the course given. To some extent, this online course was a very valuable repetition of some general things. Besides it has taught me that simplicity is the tool that brings common understanding to our papers. I realized that I will not succeed in my writing by using difficult constructions, words and grammar. The 'successful writing', if we can call it so, is not necessarily filled in with an enormous number of stylistic devices while we can overestimate their importance. Moreover, the convenience of this course can be also evaluated as it is possible to get access to it at any time from any device we use in our everyday life. I liked its structure because I saw exactly what I was supposed to do during the two weeks, saw the deadline and the way my results would be graded. Moreover, I simply liked that I could do everything in advance and finish course before the deadline. I appreciate the opportunity to share my work with other participants as it gives a push to do our work harder and with quality.

So, in my opinion, during the 'technological era' such courses should be developed in order to spread education all around the globe. I am sure that everybody might get a very valuable knowledge to use in their careers as it is very important to make written speech clearer and therefore accurate and noticeable.

### **Student 2**

I was very interested in taking part in the online-course on academic English writing when I first heard about it. I have never practiced online learning before. Thus, it is my first online-course and I do not regret that I have decided to participate in it.

Although, this course is quite clear and well-organized, at first, I was a little bit puzzled because this type of work was absolutely new for me. However, it did not take much time to understand the way we should work. In addition, we always had a possibility to contact with the principal of the course if we had questions.

This course consists of lots of interesting and different types of work. During the course I watched YouTube videos, read some chapters from the books in the content list, did writing tasks and communicated with other students to write e-mails.

With the help of the course I have learned a lot of new information. Our first task, watching a video 'An Introduction to Academic Writing' by John Kotnarowski, helped me to summarize my knowledge about academic writing and realized why academic writing is important. It allows to make individual contributions to the ongoing dialogues in their fields. Also, it allows individuals a greater voice and ability to participate in conversations about the topics which are important to them. Moreover, it helps a person to become a greater researcher and a critical thinker. Finally, it improves one's professional skills and makes one more attractive candidate for potential employers. The next task introduced me to a new term «cohesion». Now I know that cohesion refers to the way we use vocabulary and grammatical structures to make connections between the ideas within a text.

However, my favorite task was writing e-mails. I find it very interesting to share my thoughts with other students and learn their points of view. My group mates and I discussed such topics as drawbacks in emails and the ways to secure our information.

In conclusion, I can confidently say that I am glad to be a part of this course. I am absolutely sure that this knowledge will be very useful to me in my future, for example, for writing my course paper. Also, I realized that online education can be efficient and very interesting. Furthermore, someday I would like to part in some other online course which I will be interested in because I liked such experience very much.

### **Student 3**

Two weeks ago, I was invited to take part in my first online course devoted to Academic Writing. During the course, I was introduced to the basics with the help of which I can more competently and consciously write any kinds of academic documents. Within this course, I was given a proper theoretical knowledge which later was attached to the practical tasks. I watched videos about academic writing, read given articles on the topic, compared my work with the work of other students who took part in the course. It was a great experience which I hope will help me in developing my knowledge on the topic.

With the help of this course, I learned a lot of new information. For example, during the first week of the course, I learned what academic writing really is. At first, I believed, that Academic Writing is a set of particular rules, grammatical constructions and specific words, which are used in highly specialized on a certain subject science works. There I was incorrect. With the help of the videos which were given on the first and the second days I learned, that Academic Writing is the variety of the English language that we use to share research, which refers to the process of answering questions by creating an argument that is supported through the critical analysis and the use of evidence. Moreover, relying on the reflections of the other students of the course, I believe, I understood the following tasks better.

Furthermore, at the end of week one, I was requested to write the letters in which I needed to uncover the problems referring to Academic Writing. I chose the problems, relying on the articles I had read - the politeness in writing and the differences of informal and formal type of



speech and when it is possible to change from one type to the other. With the help of my group mates who gently decided to help me in my research, we managed to discuss the problems above and tried to find the solutions to them.

During week two I was requested to do a lot of research studies, in which I needed to read given articles, watch the videos and do the tasks developing my knowledge in Academic Writing.

I find this course very helpful, as it gives an opportunity, first of all, to develop one's language. Moreover, the knowledge which was given in those tasks is very important for writing grammatically and lexically correct letters and other formal documents. I also believe that this course helps in developing some basic communication skills as I needed to communicate and work with other students.

I genuinely believe, this was a very valuable experience, and I hope to do more tasks on this topic and any other topics which I can develop during different courses online and offline.

## Appendix N. Timeline

The following timeline was created to conduct the study.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event or Activity</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1/15/2019	Received approval from thesis advisor on university IRB (Institutional Review Board) study instruments and IRB Consent Forms	
1/17/2019	Submitted Study to IRB	1/28/19
2/1/2019	Received approval from IRB	Because it took longer than expected to receive the IRB approval, and I also had to review my protocol and resubmit it, the expected timeline dates were pushed forward. Approval date: 3/5/19
2/3/2019	Notified Participants Study- Requested Signed Consent	3/6-8/19
2/5/2010	Online course opened Participants completed pre-questionnaire	3/11/19
2/19/2018	Online course closed Participants completed post-questionnaire	3/22/19
2/20-28/2019	Conducted interviews with the students and the instructor	3/25/19
3/1-15/2019	Transcribed interviews	3/26/19
3/15-30/2019	Analyzed writing samples	3/26-31/19
3/15-30/2019	Coded Interviews/Analyzed Data	3/26-31/19
4/1-10/2019	Wrote Chapters 4 and 5	