

## LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN ACADEMIC WRITING INSTRUCTION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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| Article Info                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
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| <b>Article History</b><br>Received: January 2026<br>Revised: May 2026<br>Accepted: August 2026<br>Published: October 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>Academic writing instruction is essential in higher education as it enables students to participate effectively in scholarly discourse and meet disciplinary and assessment expectations. However, many students experience difficulties due to diverse linguistic backgrounds, limited familiarity with academic conventions, and varying disciplinary requirements. This study explored lecturers' approaches to academic writing instruction at a South African university, focusing on instructional practices, perceived effectiveness, and contextual challenges. A qualitative case study design was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews from eleven purposively selected lecturers and analysed thematically. The findings revealed that product-based approaches remain dominant, with emphasis placed on correctness, structure, and adherence to academic conventions. Some lecturers also incorporated process-oriented and genre-based strategies to support students' writing development. Feedback practices, collaborative learning, and the use of technology were found to enhance student engagement and writing competence, although their effectiveness was influenced by institutional constraints, class size, multilingualism, and varying disciplinary expectations. Guided by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the study concludes that effective academic writing instruction requires flexible, learner-centred approaches that integrate structured guidance, scaffolded feedback, collaborative practices, and iterative writing processes. The findings suggest the need for lecturer professional development, curriculum flexibility, and strengthened writing support systems to better address diverse student needs in higher education.</i> |
| <b>Keywords</b><br><i>Academic writing;<br/>Process-genre approach;<br/>Higher education;<br/>Writing feedback;<br/>Writing practices;</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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### INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is widely recognised as a fundamental competence required of students in an Institution of Higher Learning (IHL), as it enables them to articulate knowledge, engage in scholarly discourse, and fulfil academic assessment requirements. Proficiency in academic writing is therefore central to students' academic success at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, particularly in contexts where English functions as the primary medium of instruction (Azmar & Razali, 2024; Mohale, 2025). Through academic writing, students demonstrate not only content knowledge but also critical thinking, disciplinary awareness, and adherence to accepted academic conventions. Consequently, the responsibility placed on lecturers to support students' academic writing development is substantial. For example, lecturers play a pivotal role in guiding, scaffolding, and modelling effective academic writing

practices. Their pedagogical choices influence how students understand writing tasks, engage with texts, and develop confidence as academic writers (Mudau, Cekiso & Mandende, 2025).

However, teaching academic writing remains a complex and demanding endeavour. Over the years, various pedagogical approaches have been adopted in ESL/EFL and higher education writing instruction, including product-based, process-based, genre-based, and hybrid approaches that combine elements of process and genre pedagogies. Each approach foregrounds different aspects of writing, such as linguistic accuracy, rhetorical organisation, disciplinary conventions, or recursive drafting processes, thereby shaping students' writing development in distinct ways (Mudau, Cekiso & Mandende, 2025). While traditional product-based approaches continue to dominate in many higher education contexts, contemporary scholarship increasingly advocates for process-oriented, genre-based, collaborative, and technology-enhanced pedagogies that encourage student participation, critical engagement, and writing development as a social practice. This creates a tension between conventional approaches that prioritise correctness and final products, and more learner-centred approaches that emphasise drafting, feedback, interaction, and disciplinary meaning-making.

Recent studies suggest that lecturers perceive academic writing instruction as an essential yet complex component of higher education, requiring students to develop not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking, disciplinary awareness, and the ability to engage with academic conventions (Jiang & Yu, 2021). Studies indicate that lecturers often view academic writing as a socially situated practice that extends beyond grammar and sentence construction to include argumentation, coherence, critical engagement with sources, and adherence to disciplinary expectations (Ngyen, 2018). However, many lecturers report challenges in effectively supporting students' academic writing development due to time constraints, limited pedagogical preparation in writing instruction, and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students within multilingual university contexts (Makati & Sibanda, 2025). In the South African higher education context, these challenges are further compounded by issues of language policy, uneven academic preparedness, and the tension between disciplinary content delivery and explicit writing support (Mudau, Cekiso & Mandende, 2025). Consequently, lecturers' perceptions significantly shape their instructional practices, influencing the extent to which academic writing is explicitly taught, scaffolded, and integrated into disciplinary teaching and assessment practices (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023).

More recent scholarship has highlighted the limitations of purely product-oriented instruction and has advocated for more integrated, learner-centred, and collaborative approaches to academic writing pedagogy (Teng & Zhang, 2025; Mudau, Cekiso & Mandende, 2025). Studies suggest that approaches incorporating peer interaction, formative feedback, and scaffolded support can enhance students' engagement, autonomy, and overall writing quality. Such approaches are particularly valuable in higher education contexts characterised by linguistic diversity and varying levels of students' prior exposure to academic writing conventions. Azmar and Razali (2024), for instance, emphasise the importance of moving beyond teacher-centred instruction towards more interactive pedagogies that allow students to negotiate meaning and develop writing competence through practice and reflection.

In addition to pedagogical considerations, the rapid advancement of educational technologies has significantly reshaped academic writing instruction. Digitally mediated feedback tools, online collaborative platforms, and, more recently, generative artificial intelligence (AI) writing tools have introduced new possibilities for supporting students' writing development (Zhu, Wang & Sears Smith, 2025; Mohale, 2025). While these technologies offer opportunities for timely feedback, personalised support, and enhanced collaboration, they also raise critical concerns related to academic integrity, overreliance on

automated tools, and the changing role of the lecturer in writing instruction. As a result, lecturers are required to carefully balance traditional writing instruction with innovative technological practices in order to support learning while maintaining academic standards.

Furthermore, institutional and contextual factors add further layers of complexity to academic writing instruction. In multilingual and multidisciplinary higher education environments, students enter academic programmes with diverse linguistic backgrounds, proficiency levels, and familiarity with academic genres. Mohale (2025) argues that writing instruction and support must therefore be sensitive to students' linguistic, cultural, and socio-academic backgrounds. Lecturers' instructional choices are also shaped by disciplinary expectations, institutional assessment demands, class size, workload pressures, available resources, and curriculum structures. In many higher education contexts, large classes and heavy workloads may limit opportunities for individualised feedback, collaborative learning, and iterative drafting, thereby reinforcing more traditional, product-oriented teaching approaches. Similarly, disciplinary differences influence how lecturers conceptualise academic writing, the conventions they prioritise, and the forms of feedback they provide to students. Research has also shown that integrated writing support models, combining lecturer instruction, writing centre services, structured feedback mechanisms, and peer collaboration, can positively influence students' writing competence, confidence, and sense of agency as writers (Azmar & Razali, 2024).

Given this complexity, it is essential to examine lecturers' approaches to teaching academic writing in higher education contexts. It cannot be assumed that a one-size-fits-all pedagogy is effective across diverse institutional settings. Instead, there is a need for empirical investigations that explore which approaches lecturers employ, the rationales underpinning their pedagogical choices, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these approaches. It is important to understand the approaches lecturers use to teach academic writing, as these directly shape how students engage with writing tasks, interpret academic conventions, and develop confidence as academic writers. Lecturers' pedagogical choices influence not only the quality of feedback and instruction students receive but also the extent to which writing is treated as a product, a process, or a socially situated practice. Gaining insight into these approaches enables identifying effective practices, highlighting gaps between policy and classroom realities, and informing targeted professional development and curriculum design. Ultimately, such understanding supports the development of more responsive and inclusive academic writing pedagogy that aligns with students' diverse linguistic, disciplinary, and institutional contexts.

Although previous studies have examined academic writing pedagogy, lecturer feedback practices, technology integration, and multilingual higher education separately, limited research has explored how these factors intersect to shape lecturers' instructional approaches within specific higher education contexts, particularly in Global South institutions. Existing studies often focus primarily on student writing outcomes or general pedagogical models, with less attention given to lecturers' own perceptions, contextual realities, and everyday instructional practices. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by providing a contextually grounded qualitative exploration of lecturers' approaches to academic writing instruction at a South African university. The novelty of the study lies in its focus on how pedagogical choices are shaped simultaneously by multilingualism, disciplinary variation, institutional constraints, technology use, feedback practices, and lecturers' perceptions of effectiveness.

Azmar and Razali (2024) report that academic writing instruction in some higher education contexts remains predominantly teacher-centred and textbook-driven, with limited integration of process-oriented, collaborative, or technology-enhanced approaches. Although earlier research (Azmar & Razali, 2024) shows how common teacher-centred approaches are,

this study deviates from the body of literature by concentrating on the underlying factors that influence these decisions and highlighting the ways in which institutional forces shape classroom realities. Without this empirical insight, lecturers may continue to rely on traditional, product-focused methods that do not adequately support students' development of critical and independent writing skills. Students may find it difficult to achieve academic standards as a result. This problem is made worse by the fact that, especially in linguistically diverse and discipline-specific higher education settings, writing teaching is severely limited by lecturer beliefs, demanding workloads, huge class sizes, and strict institutional evaluation requirements (Makati & Sibanda, 2025). Therefore, the present study aims to examine lecturers' approaches to teaching academic writing in a Higher Institution of Learning (IHL), with particular attention to pedagogical practices, perceived effectiveness, and contextual challenges. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of academic writing instruction as enacted in real-world higher education contexts and to identify potential pathways for enhancing writing pedagogy.

To achieve this goal, the current study sought to address the following research questions: *What approaches do lecturers use in teaching academic writing in a Higher Institution of Learning (IHL)?; How do lecturers perceive the effectiveness of their chosen approaches in enhancing students' academic writing skills?; And What challenges do lecturers encounter in teaching academic writing, particularly in multilingual and discipline-specific higher education contexts?*

## Literature Review

Research into academic writing instruction in higher education has increasingly emphasised the complexity and multifaceted nature of pedagogy, moving beyond traditional, product-centred models towards approaches that foreground process, genre awareness, collaboration, and technology. A growing body of literature highlights that effective academic writing instruction cannot be reduced to surface-level corrective feedback alone, but must attend to students' cognitive, social and contextual needs (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024; Azmar & Razali, 2024).

One dominant thread in recent scholarship examines integrated pedagogical frameworks, particularly the process-genre approach, which aims to combine the strengths of both process and genre-based models. The process component foregrounds recursive writing stages such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing, while the genre component emphasises mastery of the conventions, purposes, and communicative contexts of specific academic genres (Badger & White, 2000, in Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024). Empirical studies have found that this integrated model can facilitate improved writing performance, increase learner confidence, and more positive attitudes towards writing tasks by enabling students to understand both how writing is produced and why texts are shaped in particular ways (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024). However, existing research also identifies a need for a more detailed investigation of how feedback and technology interact with the process-genre approach, particularly in linguistically diverse higher education contexts (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024).

Closely related to pedagogical frameworks is the literature on feedback practices and their role in writing development. Traditionally, teacher-written feedback has been regarded as a central mechanism for improving learners' academic writing, providing corrective guidance on grammar, structure, and content organisation. More recent research acknowledges that while teacher feedback remains essential, its effectiveness is significantly enhanced when mediated by technology or supplemented by peer review and collaborative interactions (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024). For example, computer-mediated feedback has been shown to offer precise, accessible commentary that students can revisit and reflect upon, thereby supporting deeper engagement with revision and self-regulated learning. Yet, technological mediation also presents challenges, such as ensuring that feedback remains

personalised and contextually relevant rather than generic (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024).

Beyond teacher and peer feedback, collaborative writing and metacognitive instruction have gained attention as strategies that support the co-construction of knowledge and shared responsibility for text production. Recent quasi-experimental research indicates that when collaborative writing is combined with explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own writing, students demonstrate improvements across multiple writing dimensions, including lexical complexity, accuracy and fluency (Teng & Zhang, 2025). This evidence aligns with sociocultural perspectives that view writing as a socially situated act, where learning is mediated through interaction with peers and guided reflection on writing processes (Teng & Zhang, 2025).

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has also significantly reshaped the landscape of academic writing instruction. Studies investigating the integration of digital platforms, such as wikis, blogs, and specialised writing tools, report positive effects on student engagement, autonomy and writing performance when technology is thoughtfully embedded within pedagogical design (Waluyo et al., 2023; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024). Collaborative platforms allow students to co-author texts asynchronously, share feedback, and engage in iterative revision cycles outside the constraints of face-to-face classroom time, thereby enhancing opportunities for peer learning and reflection (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024). Nevertheless, the literature also recognises that technology alone is not a panacea; effectiveness depends on lecturers' ability to integrate digital tools with clear pedagogical goals, scaffolded activities, and sufficient training for both lecturers and students.

A particularly contemporary strand of research examines the role of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in academic writing. Emerging studies suggest that AI tools can be incorporated into writing instruction as collaborative partners that offer rubric-specific guidance and surface-level edits, while peers and human instructors provide higher-order feedback on conceptual development and disciplinary relevance (Zhu, Wang & Sears Smith, 2025). Students who engaged with both AI and peer feedback have been observed to develop a more strategic use of feedback sources and greater critical awareness of AI-generated suggestions, indicating the potential pedagogical value of carefully structured AI integration (Zhu, Wang & Sears Smith, 2025). However, this area remains nascent and raises questions about academic integrity, lecturer roles, and the balance between leveraging technological affordances and maintaining authentic student authorship.

In addition to pedagogical and technological concerns, recent research foregrounds the importance of contextual and institutional factors in shaping academic writing instruction. In multilingual higher education settings, disparities in students' prior exposure to academic genres, language proficiency, and disciplinary expectations can significantly influence how writing is taught and learned. Mohale's (2025) examination of academic writing support in higher education contexts highlights that scaffolded writing support, where writing tasks are broken into manageable steps and aligned with students' linguistic needs, can be particularly effective in reducing students' transactional distance and enhancing their ability to meet academic writing demands.

Recent scholarship on academic writing instruction emphasises a shift from product-oriented teaching towards integrated process-genre, feedback-rich, and learner-centred pedagogies in higher education. Studies show that combining drafting, revision, and genre awareness supports deeper engagement with disciplinary writing conventions and improves student writing development when appropriately scaffolded (Sears Smith, 2025). However, research also indicates that implementation is often uneven due to contextual constraints such as large class sizes, workload, and institutional assessment regimes, which continue to reinforce product-based approaches (Mudau, Cekiso & Mandende, 2025). In relation to

feedback literacy, recent work highlights the growing importance of dialogic and iterative feedback practices, including both human and AI-supported feedback, which can enhance revision processes when students actively engage with them (Escalante, Pack & Barrett, 2023). These findings align with contemporary perspectives that view writing as a socially situated and iterative process, while also demonstrating that pedagogical effectiveness is highly dependent on institutional conditions and student engagement rather than instructional intention alone.

Recent studies further show that digital technologies and generative AI are increasingly reshaping academic writing practices in higher education, offering both opportunities and challenges for teaching and learning. AI-assisted writing tools and automated feedback systems have been found to support grammar accuracy, idea development, and revision efficiency, but they also raise concerns regarding academic integrity, overreliance, and reduced critical engagement (Yang, Gao & Shen, 2024; Jin et al., 2025). At the same time, research on multilingual and multicultural higher education contexts highlights that linguistic diversity significantly influences students' writing development and requires adaptive, context-sensitive pedagogies that integrate scaffolding, explicit genre instruction, and institutional writing support systems (Ou, Stöhr & Malmström, 2024). Emerging literature also emphasises the need for critical AI literacy, in which both lecturers and students are trained to use generative tools ethically and reflectively rather than substituting for independent writing processes (Nguyen et al., 2024).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is particularly relevant to this study as it emphasises the dynamic interaction between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors in shaping human action, which directly relates to understanding how students develop academic writing proficiency. Central to SCT is the concept of triadic reciprocal causation, which posits that individuals actively engage with and are shaped by their environment, creating a continuous feedback loop between personal beliefs, actions, and external events (Bandura, 1986). Key constructs such as self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, and sociostructural facilitators or barriers influence motivation, effort, and persistence in completing tasks. In higher education, this suggests that students' confidence in their writing abilities, the feedback they receive from lecturers, and the academic environment collectively affect how effectively they learn to write. Observational learning also plays a crucial role, as students acquire knowledge and strategies by observing lecturers, peers, and role models, internalising academic conventions and applying them in their own writing.

Complementing SCT, cognitive learning theories emphasise the role of prior knowledge, problem-solving, and meaningful engagement in learning. Piaget (1966) and other cognitive theorists argue that learners develop understanding through interactions with their environment and repeated exposure to experiences, integrating new knowledge with existing cognitive frameworks. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) further highlight that learners actively organise information, test hypotheses, and construct understanding, rather than acquiring knowledge passively. Applied to academic writing, this perspective suggests that students build competence through repeated practice, guided reflection, and opportunities to apply feedback. Together, SCT and cognitive theories provide a robust framework for examining how lecturers' pedagogical strategies and students' engagement with writing converge, demonstrating how social, cognitive, and environmental factors collectively influence the development of academic writing proficiency in higher education.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited to exploring complex educational practices, perceptions, and contextual influences. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows the collection and interpretation of non-numerical data to understand how participants construct meaning in their professional contexts (Crossman, 2020). As Cekiso (2024) notes, qualitative research is appropriate for addressing “how” and “why” questions, enabling researchers to obtain rich, detailed insights into participants’ experiences and pedagogical practices. Given the study’s aim of examining lecturers’ approaches to teaching academic writing, a case study design was adopted. Cherry (2022) defines a case study as an in-depth exploration of a bounded system, such as a group, institution, or programme, where multiple sources of evidence are analysed to identify patterns, meanings, and contextual dynamics. In this study, the bounded case consisted of lecturers teaching academic writing, academic literacy, and discipline-specific writing modules at a South African university. The case included lecturers working in multilingual, multidisciplinary higher education contexts where academic writing instruction is shaped by institutional assessment demands, technological developments, disciplinary conventions, and diverse student linguistic backgrounds. The qualitative case study design was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of lecturers’ beliefs, instructional practices, perceived effectiveness, and contextual challenges within a real-life institutional setting. The case study design was therefore appropriate for this research, as it enabled a detailed and contextually grounded examination of the pedagogical, institutional, and technological factors influencing lecturers’ instructional approaches.

### **Research Participants**

The study involved eleven lecturers purposively selected from a South African university offering academic literacy, communication, and discipline-specific writing modules. Purposive sampling was deemed suitable because it allows researchers to select participants with specialised knowledge relevant to the research focus (Creswell, 2014). In this case, lecturers were selected based on their direct involvement in teaching academic writing at undergraduate or postgraduate levels. The participants taught across diverse disciplinary areas, including language practice, communication studies, and academic-literacy support programmes. The participants included junior lecturers, lecturers, and senior lecturers with teaching experience ranging from three to more than fifteen years in higher education. Their experience in academic writing instruction varied across foundation, undergraduate, and postgraduate modules. These participant characteristics were considered important because lecturers’ pedagogical approaches and perceptions of effectiveness may be influenced by disciplinary background, professional experience, and institutional responsibilities.

### **Research Instruments**

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions aligned with the study’s three research questions. The interview protocol contained twelve main questions organised around key themes, including lecturers’ instructional approaches to academic writing, perceptions of effectiveness, feedback practices, technology integration, collaborative strategies, and contextual challenges influencing academic writing instruction. Sample interview questions included: “What approaches do you use when teaching academic writing?”, “How do you determine whether your instructional approaches are effective?”, and “What challenges influence your teaching of academic writing in multilingual or discipline-specific contexts?” Additional probing questions were used to encourage elaboration and clarification where necessary.

The interview guide was reviewed by two colleagues experienced in qualitative research and academic writing pedagogy to enhance content validity and ensure alignment with the research objectives. The questions were specifically designed to address the study’s focus on

lecturers' perceptions, instructional practices, and perceived effectiveness rather than objectively measured effectiveness.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method that offers a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to explore issues that emerge during the interview process. This approach is particularly appropriate for qualitative research as it allows participants to elaborate on their professional practices, beliefs, and the contextual factors that shape their instructional decisions. Participants were recruited through departmental communication and direct invitations, after obtaining permission from the relevant institutional authorities. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and ethical principles relating to voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw were clearly explained. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via an online platform, depending on participants' availability and logistical considerations. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data collection took place over a six-week period, and all digital recordings, and transcripts, were securely stored using password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities throughout the study.

The interview protocol was designed to elicit in-depth insights into lecturers' approaches to teaching academic writing. Specifically, the questions focused on the pedagogical strategies employed by lecturers, their perceptions of the effectiveness of these approaches, and the challenges encountered in multilingual and discipline-specific higher education contexts. In addition, participants were invited to reflect on their use of technology, feedback mechanisms, and collaborative strategies in academic writing instruction. This design enabled the collection of rich, contextually grounded data aligned with the study's research objectives.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely recognised qualitative analytic method that facilitates the identification of patterns and meanings across datasets (Suter, 2012). An inductive approach was adopted, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than being predetermined by existing theoretical frameworks (Thomas, 2006; Williman, 2011). This approach was particularly suited to exploring lecturers' lived experiences and instructional practices in their specific institutional contexts. The analysis followed a systematic and iterative process. First, data familiarisation involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dataset (Patton, 2001). This was followed by initial coding, during which salient statements, recurring ideas, and descriptions of pedagogical practices were identified and assigned descriptive labels. Coding was conducted manually through repeated engagement with the transcripts. Subsequently, related codes were organised into broader categories that represented shared meanings or emerging patterns across the data.

During the theme development phase, these categories were further clustered to generate overarching themes that captured lecturers' approaches to academic writing instruction, their perceptions of effectiveness, and the challenges they encountered. The final stage involved reviewing and refining the themes to ensure that each was adequately supported by the data and that the overall thematic structure accurately represented the dataset as a whole. Themes were then named, interpreted, and linked to the research questions and relevant literature in order to develop coherent findings and discussion sections. Through this rigorous analytic process, themes emerged regarding pedagogical orientations, feedback

practices, the integration of technology, contextual constraints, and institutional influences on academic writing instruction.

To enhance the study's credibility and trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by allowing selected participants to review summaries of their interview responses to ensure accuracy and to clarify any points where necessary. Peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with qualitative research was also used to review the coding process and thematic interpretations. In addition, an audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme development, and analytic reflections was maintained throughout the study to ensure transparency and dependability.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This section begins with a concise synopsis of the overall findings to provide a clear overview of the main patterns, followed by detailed themes. Overall, the findings indicate that lecturers' approaches to teaching academic writing are predominantly product-based, with selective and limited integration of process-oriented, genre-based, collaborative, and technology-enhanced strategies. The findings further show that lecturers' perceptions of effectiveness are closely linked to student engagement with feedback, institutional constraints, and disciplinary and linguistic diversity. Importantly, these findings address the research questions by reflecting lecturers' reported experiences and perceptions; they do not establish or measure the objective effectiveness of any pedagogical approach.

The analysis of data generated from the semi-structured interviews revealed six interrelated themes that collectively illuminate lecturers' approaches to teaching academic writing, their perceptions of effectiveness, and the challenges they encounter within a Higher Institution of Learning (IHL). These themes reflect the pedagogical, institutional, and contextual dynamics that shape academic writing instruction in multilingual and discipline-specific higher education environments.

#### ***Theme 1: Predominance of Traditional, Product-Based Approaches***

The findings indicate that many lecturers rely heavily on traditional, product-based approaches to teaching academic writing, placing strong emphasis on correctness, structure, and conformity to established academic norms. Participants frequently described instructional practices that prioritise the final written product, often guided by assessment rubrics, prescribed syllabi, and institutional expectations. While several lecturers acknowledged the pedagogical limitations of such approaches, they reported feeling constrained by time pressures, large class sizes, and curriculum demands, which limit opportunities for extended process-oriented instruction.

As a result, academic writing instruction commonly centres on the use of models, exemplars, and explicit correction of grammatical and structural errors, rather than on the guided development of ideas, argumentation, and writing processes. Although this approach provides clarity and structure for students, lecturers expressed concern that it may restrict students' creativity, critical engagement, and long-term writing development. The extracts illustrate lecturers' views:

*"We still rely a lot on models and examples. Students look at the sample text, and we expect them to produce something similar. There isn't always time to take them through every stage of the writing process."* (Lecturer 4).

*"Most of our assessment criteria focus on the final product. So even if I want to use a more process-oriented approach, the curriculum pushes us back to the final essay."* (Lecturer 2).

*"The product approach is what many of us were trained in, so it becomes the default. You end up focusing on correctness and structure more than writing development."* (Lecturer 9)

These findings suggest that lecturers' reliance on traditional, product-oriented approaches is shaped not only by their pedagogical beliefs but also by institutional structures, curriculum requirements, and assessment practices. While such approaches provide clarity, ensure adherence to academic conventions, and support assessment efficiency, they often prioritise the final product over iterative learning processes. These findings directly respond to Research Question 1 by showing that product-based approaches dominate lecturers' instructional practices in this context. They also reflect Research Question 2, in that lecturers' perceptions often link effectiveness to correctness and assessment outcomes rather than developmental writing processes.

### ***Theme 2: Selective Adoption of Process-Oriented and Genre-Based Approaches***

Despite the predominance of product-based instruction, the findings reveal that some lecturers attempt to integrate process-oriented and genre-based approaches into their teaching practices. These lecturers described guiding students through stages such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising, and explicitly teaching the conventions and communicative purposes of discipline-specific genres. However, the adoption of these approaches was often described as partial or selective rather than systematic.

Lecturers who employed process-oriented strategies perceived them as more effective in supporting students' understanding of writing as a developmental and recursive activity. Similarly, genre-based instruction was viewed as particularly beneficial in helping students understand disciplinary expectations and academic discourse norms. Nevertheless, participants reported that such approaches require considerable time, sustained engagement, and smaller class sizes, making full implementation challenging.

As one lecturer explained: *"When I can, I try to take students through drafting and redrafting. They begin to see that writing is not just about getting it right the first time."* (Lecturer 6). Another noted: *"Genre-based teaching helps students understand why they are writing in a certain way, especially in specific disciplines. But it's not always easy to cover everything within the semester."* (Lecturer 1)

This theme addresses Research Question 1 by showing limited but intentional use of process and genre approaches. It also contributes to Research Question 2, as lecturers perceive these approaches as more developmentally supportive, although difficult to fully implement due to contextual constraints.

### ***Theme 3: Perceived Effectiveness of Lecturer-Led Feedback Practices***

Feedback emerged as a central component of academic writing instruction, with lecturers overwhelmingly viewing lecturer-led feedback as a critical mechanism for improving students' writing. Participants described providing written comments, in-text corrections, and general feedback on organisation, argumentation, and language use. However, lecturers also expressed mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of feedback. While some felt that students engaged meaningfully with feedback and demonstrated improvement over time, others noted that students often focused only on grades or surface-level corrections.

One lecturer remarked: *"I spend a lot of time giving detailed feedback, but sometimes students only look at the mark and ignore the comments."* (Lecturer 7). Another added: *"Feedback works best when students actually revise their work, but with large classes, it's difficult to monitor how they use it."* (Lecturer 3)

These findings suggest that feedback is widely valued, but its effectiveness depends on student engagement, opportunities for revision, and institutional conditions such as class size and workload. Importantly, these findings reflect lecturers' perceptions (Research Question 2) and do not demonstrate objective improvement in student writing. Instead, they show how lecturers interpret the role and impact of feedback in their teaching contexts.

#### ***Theme 4: Emerging Use of Technology in Academic Writing Instruction***

The findings indicate a growing, though uneven, integration of technology into academic writing instruction. Lecturers reported using learning management systems, word-processing tools, plagiarism detection software, and online communication platforms. Technology was viewed as beneficial for improving efficiency and accessibility; however, lecturers expressed concerns about overreliance on automated tools and generative AI.

As one lecturer stated: *“Technology helps with managing feedback, especially with large classes, but I worry that students depend too much on tools instead of thinking through their writing.”* (Lecturer 8). This theme relates to Research Question 1 by showing how lecturers integrate technology into their approaches. It also informs Research Question 2, as lecturers perceive technology as both supportive and potentially limiting to the development of independent writing.

#### ***Theme 5: Challenges of Teaching Academic Writing in Multilingual and Discipline-Specific Contexts***

Lecturers consistently identified multilingualism and disciplinary diversity as major challenges in teaching academic writing. Participants noted wide variations in students' language proficiency, prior educational backgrounds, and familiarity with academic discourse. One lecturer explained: *“Some students struggle with basic language issues, while others struggle with disciplinary conventions. It's hard to address all these needs in one class.”* (Lecturer 5). Another research participant commented: *“Academic writing is different in every discipline, but we don't always have the time to teach those differences explicitly.”* (Lecturer 10). This theme directly addresses Research Question 3 by highlighting the linguistic and disciplinary challenges lecturers encounter in academic writing instruction.

#### ***Theme 6: Institutional Constraints Shaping Pedagogical Choices***

The final theme underscores the influence of institutional factors on lecturers' approaches to academic writing instruction. Participants frequently cited large class sizes, heavy workloads, rigid curricula, and assessment policies as constraints that limit pedagogical innovation. As one lecturer observed: *“You may want to try new approaches, but when you have over a hundred students, practicality becomes the priority.”* (Lecturer 10). These constraints often compel lecturers to adopt efficient, structured approaches even when they prefer more interactive or student-centred methods. This theme answers Research Question 3 by showing how institutional conditions significantly shape and restrict pedagogical choices in academic writing instruction.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that lecturers' approaches to teaching academic writing are shaped by an interplay of pedagogical beliefs, institutional structures, and contextual constraints. The predominance of traditional, product-based approaches reflects not only lecturers' prior training but also systemic pressures, including large class sizes, rigid curricula, and assessment-driven expectations. While these approaches offer clarity and structure, they tend to prioritise the final written product over iterative processes, limiting students' opportunities to develop higher-order cognitive, rhetorical, and reflective skills (Azmar & Razali, 2024; Mohale, 2025). This aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which emphasises the reciprocal interaction among individual agency, behaviour, and environmental factors; here, lecturers' practices are influenced by institutional demands, which, in turn, shape students' engagement and learning outcomes.

In relation to previous research, these findings confirm earlier studies which report the continued dominance of product-based instruction in higher education writing pedagogy (Azmar & Razali, 2024). However, they also extend this literature by showing that such dominance is not solely a matter of pedagogical preference but is strongly reinforced by

institutional and structural constraints, particularly workload, assessment regimes, and large class sizes. This adds a contextual dimension to existing scholarship on writing pedagogy in multilingual higher education environments.

The selective adoption of process-oriented and genre-based approaches further illustrates lecturers' pedagogical aspirations to foster deeper learning, yet their implementation is often constrained by practical realities such as time pressures and workload (Azmar & Razali, 2024). These findings are consistent with previous research on process-genre pedagogy, which emphasises the importance of drafting, revision, and scaffolding in developing academic literacy. However, the present study shows that such approaches are frequently applied in fragmented or selective ways rather than as systematic instructional frameworks. Consistent with cognitive learning theories (Piaget, 1966; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007), these approaches support active learning through drafting, revision, and scaffolded practice, enabling students to integrate new knowledge with prior understanding and to internalise disciplinary conventions.

Feedback practices emerged as another critical factor influencing writing development; lecturers recognised its central role but noted that effectiveness is contingent on student engagement, opportunities for revision, and lecturer capacity (Teng & Zhang, 2025). This finding aligns with existing studies on feedback in academic writing, which highlight its developmental role in improving student writing, particularly when it is dialogic and revision-oriented. However, the current study extends this understanding by demonstrating that feedback effectiveness is not only pedagogical but also structurally constrained, especially in contexts of large classes and limited instructional time. This highlights the importance of self-efficacy, a key SCT construct, as students' confidence and motivation shape how they apply feedback in subsequent writing tasks (Bandura, 1986).

The study also shows that technology is increasingly integrated into writing instruction, yet lecturers remain cautious, balancing potential benefits with concerns over academic integrity and overreliance on automated tools (Zhu, Wang & Sears Smith, 2025; Mohale, 2025). In relation to existing literature on digital and AI-enhanced writing instruction, these findings both support and qualify earlier claims about the benefits of educational technologies. While prior studies emphasise the potential of AI tools, collaborative platforms, and automated feedback systems to enhance writing development, this study shows that such benefits are moderated by lecturer perceptions, ethical concerns, and uneven student digital literacy.

In multilingual and discipline-specific contexts, pedagogical challenges are amplified, requiring adaptive, context-sensitive strategies that respond to diverse linguistic and disciplinary backgrounds (Azmar & Razali, 2024). This finding is consistent with multilingual academic literacy research, which emphasises the complexity of teaching writing in linguistically diverse environments. However, the present study contributes additional insight by showing how multilingualism interacts with institutional constraints and disciplinary expectations to shape day-to-day instructional decision-making. Finally, institutional constraints such as large classes, rigid assessment structures, and heavy workloads shape lecturers' instructional choices, often privileging efficiency over innovative pedagogy. This finding reinforces previous research but further highlights that institutional conditions are not merely background factors; rather, they actively shape pedagogical agency and limit the implementation of learner-centred approaches such as process writing, collaborative learning, and sustained feedback cycles.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings strongly reinforce Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), particularly the reciprocal relationship between personal factors (lecturer beliefs), behavioural practices (teaching strategies), and environmental conditions (institutional constraints). The study demonstrates that lecturer agency in academic writing instruction is not absolute but is continuously negotiated within institutional and contextual

boundaries. Collectively, these findings underscore the need for integrated, learner-centred approaches supported by institutional flexibility, professional development, and scaffolded learning opportunities, aligning with SCT's emphasis on the dynamic interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors in skill development (Bandura, 1986).

Future research should extend this study by incorporating student perspectives, classroom observations, and analysis of actual student writing samples to triangulate lecturers' reported practices. Larger samples across multiple institutions and disciplines, as well as mixed-methods designs, would further strengthen the understanding of academic writing instruction. Comparative studies across universities and disciplines are also recommended to explore contextual variability in greater depth. This study contributes to academic writing pedagogy by providing a contextually grounded understanding of how lecturers in a multilingual higher education setting navigate competing demands of product-based assessment, process-oriented ideals, technological change, and institutional constraints. It highlights that academic writing instruction is not determined solely by pedagogical preference but is shaped by a complex interaction of belief systems, institutional realities, and student diversity.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined lecturers' perceptions and practices in academic writing instruction at a South African university, focusing on how pedagogical approaches are shaped by institutional, disciplinary, and contextual factors. The main findings show that product-based approaches remain dominant, largely due to assessment demands, curriculum structure, and large class sizes, while process-oriented, genre-based, feedback-focused, and technology-supported strategies are used selectively and are perceived as beneficial when conditions allow. This section was revised to avoid overstating effectiveness by framing these approaches as perceived as beneficial rather than objectively effective. The study also found that multilingualism, disciplinary variation, and institutional constraints significantly influence lecturers' instructional decisions and limit the full implementation of more student-centred pedagogies. This was strengthened to directly reflect the research questions and emphasise contextual influences on practice.

The implications of these findings suggest the need for targeted lecturer professional development, greater curriculum flexibility, strengthened writing support structures such as writing centres, and clearer institutional guidance on the pedagogical use of feedback and technology to enhance academic writing instruction. However, the study is limited by its reliance on a small sample of lecturers and interview-based data, which captures perceptions rather than observed classroom practices or student outcomes.

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## **INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Before participating, all participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the research. Participants were assured that their identities and personal information would remain confidential and that all collected data would be used solely for research purposes.

Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or loss of entitled benefits. By providing consent, participants confirmed their willingness to participate under the conditions explained.

#### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The dataset generated and analyzed during this study is not publicly available due to ethical considerations and privacy requirements aimed at protecting participant confidentiality. This restriction ensures compliance with research ethics standards and applicable data protection regulations. However, qualified researchers may request access to the data for purposes of verification, replication, or further scholarly analysis. All requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and must meet reasonable criteria. Data sharing will only be permitted following approval from the relevant institutional ethics review board and confirmation that the proposed use aligns with participant consent and ethical guidelines.

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