

Teaching Academic Writing in Nepal: Gaps, Pressures, and Possibilities for Undergraduate Students

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1. Introduction

Academic writing is a fundamental skill for undergraduate students, shaping their ability to engage critically with knowledge and express ideas effectively. However, in Nepal, the teaching and learning of academic writing at the undergraduate level face numerous challenges, including institutional constraints and pedagogical limitations. This study seeks to explore the gaps and pressures in teaching and learning academic writing in Nepal while identifying possibilities for improvement. Focusing on a Tribhuvan University-affiliated college in Kathmandu, the research will examine how rigid curricula, compressed academic timeframes, limited instructional resources, and an underdeveloped academic writing culture influence the teaching and learning of academic writing at the undergraduate level.

The research problem stems from the disconnect between the expectations of academic writing and the realities of its instruction in Nepal. Tribhuvan University, the country's largest higher education institution, faces multiple constraints: rigid curricula prioritizing content memorization over analytical writing, limited teacher training in academic writing, and institutional resource shortages. Additionally, the pressure to complete degrees within compressed timeframes discourages iterative drafting and feedback, key components of writing development. As a result, students often produce superficial or plagiarized work, reflecting a broader crisis in academic literacy. This study will investigate these institutional and pedagogical gaps while exploring possibilities for strengthening academic writing instruction in Nepal's undergraduate programs.

2. Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

- To identify and analyze the institutional and pedagogical barriers hindering effective academic writing instruction in Nepalese undergraduate programs.
- To examine faculty perspectives on their teaching roles and challenges, as well as student experiences with academic writing difficulties.
- To explore potential strategies and reforms for improving academic writing in undergraduate students

3. Research Questions

To guide the research, the following questions will be addressed:

- What institutional and pedagogical barriers create academic writing difficulties for students in Tribhuvan University colleges?

- How do faculty perceptions of their teaching roles and challenges correlate with the academic writing problems experienced by undergraduate students in Nepal?
- What strategies could address both institutional constraints and student writing challenges to improve academic writing outcomes in Nepalese undergraduate programs?

4. Literature Review

While academic writing in undergraduate education has been extensively researched in global contexts, Nepal's specific challenges remain underexplored, particularly at Tribhuvan University, where formal academic writing instruction for undergraduates is a relatively new development. Existing studies on higher education have primarily focused on graduate and postgraduate levels, leaving a significant gap in understanding the foundational writing challenges faced by undergraduate students. This literature review examines the limited but growing body of work on academic writing in Nepal while drawing upon relevant international studies to frame the current research.

Academic writing functions as a transactional process where students negotiate meaning within disciplinary communities (Britton, 1992). This perspective is operationalized in Wolsey et al.'s (2012) study of teacher-student perception gaps, where teachers valued "description, classificatory structures, and evaluation" (p. 719) while students focused on surface features like formatting. The transactional dynamic breaks down when students prioritize "mechanical control of language" (Wolsey et al., 2012, p. 718) over engaging with content, mirroring Britton's concern that writing becomes a unilateral performance rather than a dialogic exchange. Wolsey et al. (2012) further demonstrate this disconnect through student-teacher expectation mismatches, where 55% of students viewed academic writing as adhering to prescribed formats, while teachers emphasized "global moves" like synthesis (p. 719). These findings suggest that transactional writing requires explicit scaffolding of disciplinary dialogue to bridge perception gaps.

Campbell (2019) highlights the universal struggles students face with academic writing, particularly in cross-cultural contexts where Western academic genres dominate. Her research reveals that both domestic and international students encounter difficulties with "language barriers and unfamiliarity with western writing genres" (p. 608), mirroring the challenges Nepalese undergraduates face when transitioning from rote-learning traditions to critical academic writing.

Banshidhar Joshi's (2019) study reveals critical systemic issues in Nepalese universities' academic writing instruction, particularly at the Master's level, which mirror the challenges faced by undergraduate students in your research. His findings highlight a predominant focus on product-oriented writing rather than process-based pedagogy (p. 127), with teachers emphasizing final submissions over developmental writing stages, a practice that aligns with this research observation of Tribhuvan University's rigid curricula. Notably, Joshi identifies key institutional barriers, including: lack of teacher training in writing instruction (p. 129), absence of constructive feedback mechanisms (p. 129), and administrative indifference to scholarly

activities (p. 130). The literature reveals that Nepalese undergraduate writing instruction remains constrained by product-centric approaches, underprepared teachers, and institutional inertia. This trifecta of challenges, pedagogical, cultural, and systemic, perpetuates a cycle where students prioritize formulaic compliance over critical engagement. Reforms must address these interconnected barriers through process-oriented frameworks adapted to local contexts.

5. Methodology

This study will adopt a qualitative case study approach to explore the institutional and pedagogical challenges associated with teaching academic writing at the undergraduate level in Nepal. The research will focus on a Tribhuvan University-affiliated college in Kathmandu, providing a focused context for examining the dynamics of academic writing instruction.

5.1 Research Design

The research will use a case study design, appropriate for investigating complex educational phenomena within their real-life context. This approach will enable an in-depth understanding of how both teachers and students navigate academic writing within existing institutional frameworks.

5.2 Participants

The study will involve a small, purposive sample of:

- Two faculty members who are directly involved in teaching writing-related courses or supervising student academic writing.
- Two undergraduate students who have recently completed writing assignments or research projects.

Participants will be selected based on their relevance to the research questions and their willingness to provide detailed insights into their experiences.

5.3 Data Collection Methods

The following methods will be employed to gather qualitative data:

- Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth interviews will be conducted with both faculty members and students. Faculty interviews will explore their teaching practices, challenges they face in instructing academic writing, and their views on institutional support and curriculum structure. Student interviews will focus on their experiences with academic writing, difficulties encountered, the kind of feedback they receive, and their perceptions of academic writing instruction.

- Document Analysis

A small set of anonymized student writing samples (one from each participating student) will be collected to examine writing structure, use of citation, engagement with content, and evidence of critical thinking. Institutional documents, such as course syllabi or writing assignment guidelines, will also be reviewed to understand the pedagogical context.

5.4 Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The following steps will be followed:

- Transcripts and documents will be reviewed multiple times for familiarization.
- Initial codes will be generated based on recurring patterns.
- Codes will be grouped into broader themes, such as “instructional limitations,” “curriculum rigidity,” “feedback and support,” and “student writing struggles.”
- Themes will be refined and interpreted in relation to the research objectives.

Although the participant pool is small, the depth of qualitative engagement will allow rich, contextual understanding of the challenges and possibilities related to academic writing instruction.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, ethical clearance will be obtained from the relevant institutional authority. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, and written consent will be collected. Identities of participants and institutions will be anonymized, and all data will be handled confidentially and used exclusively for research purposes.

6. Expected Outcome

This study is expected to reveal a complex interplay of institutional, pedagogical, and cultural factors that hinder the effective teaching and learning of academic writing in Nepalese undergraduate programs. It will highlight systemic issues such as rigid curricula, inadequate teacher training, lack of institutional support, and student reliance on surface-level writing practices, which collectively compromise students’ academic literacy development. The research is anticipated to underscore the gap between the intended outcomes of academic writing instruction and the actual practices in classrooms, both from faculty and student perspectives. Furthermore, it is expected to identify potential areas for reform, such as integrating process-oriented pedagogies, improving teachers’ approach, creating opportunities for constructive feedback, and fostering a writing culture within institutions. These findings will offer grounded recommendations for policy-makers, educators, and curriculum developers aiming to strengthen academic writing competencies at the undergraduate level in Nepal.

7. Conclusion

The teaching of academic writing at the undergraduate level in Nepal, particularly within Tribhuvan University-affiliated colleges, faces multifaceted challenges rooted in institutional rigidity, pedagogical gaps, and cultural norms of rote learning. Despite the growing recognition of academic writing as a vital skill for higher education, current instructional practices often fall short of fostering critical thinking, analytical engagement, and effective written communication. This study, by examining the lived experiences of both faculty and students, aims to uncover the underlying barriers and explore practical strategies for reform. Ultimately, strengthening academic writing instruction requires a shift toward process-based pedagogies, enhanced faculty training, and systemic commitment to nurturing a system of academic inquiry and exploration.

Relevance to CCCC Workshop

My research project, *Teaching Academic Writing in Nepal: Gaps, Pressures, and Possibilities for Undergraduate Students*, investigates the institutional and pedagogical challenges hindering effective academic writing instruction at Tribhuvan University-affiliated colleges in Kathmandu. Through a qualitative case study involving faculty interviews, student perspectives, and document analysis, the study aims to uncover systemic barriers such as rigid curricula, limited teacher training, and cultural reliance on rote learning, while exploring strategies for reform. This research connects with global writing studies by contributing a localized perspective from Nepal, where academic writing instruction remains underexplored at the undergraduate level. It aligns with broader discussions on cross-cultural academic literacy, process-oriented pedagogies, and institutional constraints in resource-limited contexts. Researchers studying writing education in similar Global South settings or those examining teacher-student perception gaps may find parallels or contrasts to their work. The study also offers practical insights for policymakers and educators seeking to adapt Western academic writing frameworks to non-Western educational systems. Potential audiences include journals like *College Composition and Communication*, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *The Journal of Writing Research*, *WPA: Writing Program Administration* or regional publications focused on South Asian higher education. By sharing this project at the CCCC workshop, I hope to foster dialogue with writing researchers working in diverse institutional and cultural contexts, particularly those addressing equity in academic literacy development.

References

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Institutional Description

This research is conducted in a Tribhuvan University–affiliated undergraduate college in Kathmandu, Nepal, a context designed by centralized curricula, examination-driven assessment, and limited institutional investment in writing pedagogy. Tribhuvan University, the largest and most influential higher education institution in Nepal, prescribes rigid syllabi that prioritize content coverage and memorization over iterative writing processes. Undergraduate academic writing instruction remains relatively new and underdeveloped, often embedded implicitly within subject courses rather than taught as a sustained practice. Faculty members typically work under compressed academic calendars, large class sizes, and heavy teaching loads, leaving little room for drafting, feedback, or individualized writing support.

These institutional conditions significantly shape both the methods and focus of this study. The lack of formal writing centers, limited faculty training in writing instruction, and an assessment culture emphasizing final products over process contribute to students' reliance on surface-level features of writing and, in some cases, plagiarism. Conducting research within this institutional framework requires close attention to how structural constraints influence pedagogical choices, teacher beliefs, and student writing practices. The study, therefore, treats the institution not merely as a backdrop, but as an active force shaping academic literacy development in Nepal's undergraduate classrooms.

Key Theorists and Analytical Frames (Revised)

James Britton – Writing as a Transactional Process

Britton's theory of writing as a transactional and meaning-making activity frames academic writing as a dialogic practice rather than a purely technical skill. This perspective guides my analysis of how undergraduate students in Nepal experience writing as compliance with form and evaluation, rather than as engagement with ideas, and informs my attention to teacher–student expectation gaps in interviews and document analysis.

Process-Oriented Writing Pedagogy

Process-based writing theory, emphasizing drafting, feedback, revision, and reflection, provides the primary pedagogical frame for this study. It shapes both the critique of product-oriented instructional practices within Tribhuvan University–affiliated colleges and the study's recommendations for strengthening academic writing instruction under institutional constraints.

Glossary of Context- and Culture-Specific Terms

Tribhuvan University (TU)

Nepal's largest public university, operating through a centralized affiliation system that governs curricula, assessment, and academic calendars across hundreds of colleges.

Affiliated College

A semi-autonomous institution academically governed by TU syllabi and examinations, often with limited flexibility in pedagogy and curriculum design.

Product-Oriented Writing

An instructional approach emphasizing final submissions and grades over drafting, feedback, and revision; dominant in many Nepalese higher education contexts.

Process-Oriented Writing

A pedagogical model that values writing as recursive and developmental, involving planning, drafting, feedback, and revision.

Rote Learning Culture

An educational tradition emphasizing memorization and reproduction of content, which significantly shapes students' prior experiences with writing before university.

Academic Literacy

The ability to engage with disciplinary knowledge through reading, writing, and critical thinking practices recognized by academic communities.