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### Assessing Academic Writing Challenges facing Undergraduate Students at Teofilo Kisanji University in Mbeya Region, Tanzania

Marco Edward

Teofilo Kisanji University, P.O. Box 1104, Mbeya Tanzania

Correspondence: [marcomabula08@gmail.com](mailto:marcomabula08@gmail.com)

#### Abstract

This paper investigated the academic writing challenges facing undergraduate students at Teofilo Kisanji University (TEKU) in Mbeya Region. This study used Qualitative research approach and the interpretivist paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured open-ended interview and documentary analysis methods. Data were analyzed through content analysis method to obtain themes. Twenty participants formed a sample for research in the following categories educational officers, lecturers, teachers, and undergraduate students. Findings revealed that undergraduate students mostly fail to write academic papers at higher learning institutions despite having good teachers at the university. It was found that educational institutions in Ordinary and Advanced Secondary Schools failed to provide students with good basis for academic writing due to various factors, such as incompetent teachers, inadequate working environments, improper education qualifications, lack of creativity of teachers, lack of knowledge on the use of technology and the dilemma in academic instructional language. The study found that most undergraduate students failed to write academically due to poor foundation from lower levels of education. It was therefore recommended that, strengthening academic writing for students in lower-level institutions the government should review the educational curriculum to focus entirely on competence-based teaching methods.

**Keywords:** Academic writing; TEKU; Undergraduate Students; Incompetence of Teachers, Creativity of Teachers, Instructional Language

#### 1. Introduction

Writing is a deadly disease for most undergraduate students. It is a process that uses symbols, letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces to present ideas, perceptions, thoughts, and messages in a readable way (Najim, 2020). It was invented by the Sumerians in ancient Mesopotamia before 3000 BCE. Forrester (2016) has stated that, after several years, writing was discovered in other countries such as Meso-America before 600BCE, China before 1,300 BCE and Egypt around 3,000 BCE. Furthermore, Forrester (2016) explained that the types used when writing discovered were three: written sign, whole words and syllables. Rutz and Condon (2012), also explains that the type of writing used in the earliest times was alphabetic, developed around 1700 BCE in the area of Israel and Palestine by speakers of Semitic languages. Basically, writing is used to communicate what you think, what you know, and how you feel (Level, 2001). Thus, there is no meaning of writing that is acceptable on its own because each writer gives a definition based on his or her own ideas, experience, education and culture of the relevant society. Similarly, the reader, such as, scientist, educationist, and theologian agree with the definition depending on environment, education, and culture.

Despite the origin of writing and its lucid definition provided above, yet it is still a challenge to many writers. Failing to write an academic paper has become a deadly disease of many students in higher-learning educational institutions, including undergraduate students at Teofilo Kisanji University (TEKU). Students have been unable to follow and adhere to the basics of academic writing. In the normal conversation, I held some undergraduate students at Teofilo Kisanji University admitted that they, as university students, wished to write academic papers by following academic guidelines; however, due to lack of foundation on the basics of academic writing in the educational institutions they came from, this issue has become difficult for them leading them to committing plagiarism. Hence, it is very important that academics solve it to ensure that every undergraduate student does well in writing academic papers.

Although, many scholars (e.g., Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Wilson, 2022, & Bailey, 2018) have shown that writing is an important weapon for a student in academic development, to some undergraduate students, writing has become a big challenge for them yet; and some of them have been good at speaking but weak in writing. Moreover, most undergraduate students have graduated

with great success in terms of grades; but when they come across exams that involve writing, they fail to compete.

My personal survey at TEKU as one of the higher learning institutions, indicates that lecturers teach academic writing with great professionalism and competence to undergraduate students; yet those students have the challenge of adhering to the basics of academic paper writing. The basic question asked is the following: Why do most undergraduate students at TEKU and other higher learning institutions not know how to write academic papers despite the efforts of their lecturers in academic writing? It is my contention that students fail to write academic papers in higher-learning institutions, and at TEKU in particular, due to poor foundations of academic writing from their previous educational institutions. In defense of this assertion, the paper discusses the various factors that students joining TEKU face from previous schools (Ordinary and Advanced Levels).

## 2. Methodological Perspectives

This study focused on examining the challenges faced by undergraduate students in academic writing skills at Teofilo Kisanji University. The study used interpretivism as paradigm, qualitative research approach and two research methods—interviews and documentary analysis. The semi-structured open-ended questions were developed to interview various education stakeholders, including the nearby District and Ward education officers, undergraduate students, teachers and lecturers. The sample of ten people was involved in the study (2 education officers, 3 undergraduate students [2 female and 1 male], 2 teachers, and 3 lecturers). However, the study used documentary review method for examining various academic papers written by students to determine their real challenges in academic writing. At the end, raw data were collected as findings and later were analyzed using content analysis method to obtain research themes. Research was conducted under the auspices of Teofilo Kisanji University that issued research clearance; data were collected after participants' oral consent; and the confidentiality of data was handled as promised to participants before the commencement of research. Moreover, the real names of participants were kept anonymous during the reporting and discussion of obtained themes.

## 3. Factors that Cause Students' Fail to Write Academic Papers at TEKU

After explaining in detail, the background of the problem, statement of the problem, thesis statement, the outlines of the study, and the methodological approach used, this section now focuses on factors in students' previous schools (Ordinary and Advanced Levels) that lead undergraduate students at Teofilo Kisanji University fail to write good academic papers.

### 3.1 Incompetence of Teachers due to Their Poor Background

The first thing that makes students at TEKU fail in academic writing is the lack of competence of previous teachers who taught them. Most of the teachers lacked the competence to enable students to understand and use what they were taught. Nessipbayena (2012) qualifies statement when he states that a competent teacher should

have a combination of three things: knowledge, skills, and attitude that help him or her perform the work of teaching and facilitation. Nessipbayena (2012) adds that a teacher with competence that have three things, skills, knowledge, and behavior, can easily build a good student's ability in academic writing. Selvi (2010) has also supported that teachers should improve knowledge and skills to facilitate and strengthen the teaching and learning exercise for student, especially in academic writing. A competent teacher has the ability to motivate students who have given up on learning. In my opinion, Selvi (2010) and Nessipbayena (2012) have done very well when they say that competence includes skills, behavior, and knowledge. However, it would be very useful if they included experience in competence; for that reason, competence would include four elements of skills, behavior, experience and knowledge instead of three elements. For that reason, the educational institutions where the students came from before joining TEKU should strengthen the competence of teachers in terms of skills, behavior, knowledge and experience in order to build competence for teaching and learning.

Despite the assertions of scholars about the issue of competence of teachers, I conducted an interview with students at TEKU about the same issue. In the interview, one student clearly attested that "a large percentage of teachers who taught them in their previous institutions seemed to lack competence in building their ability in the basics of academic writing. The great competence of the teachers who taught them focused more on memorizing lesson notes so that they passed examinations and not understood the taught content". Moreover, Mkonongwa (2018) has joined the complaints of students when he states that the employers argue that many graduates have good examination grades but they lack competences required in the world of work. I agree with students and Mkonongwa's thoughts that many teachers teach students to know how to answer the examination and not to be able to use education as a tool to write good academic writings in their life after school. For those complaints, it is clear that the educational institutions where students came from did not have a culture of teaching how to be competent in academic writing.

Moreover, Respondent B, who was a teacher developing his academic career at the university, said that it was true that most teachers lacked competence in empowering students due to their bad foundations that were laid in the educational curriculum that required teachers to base on knowledge teaching rather than competency-based teaching. In my analysis of students' assignments at Teofilo Kisanji University, I found that those who participated in research mostly copied and pasted materials from sources, others cannot do in-text citation, and some failed to put references in a good manner. However, when I asked them about the commitment of their teachers, they said that TEKU teachers fulfilled their academic responsibilities effectively and efficiently in building the foundations of academic writing; yet they saw it as a new thing due to bad foundations of academic writing built from the previous schools and colleges where they studied.

Bush et al (1964) support the above ideas in their report. They noted that a teacher who lacks competence in teaching fails to meet individual needs and developing talents. In addition, students fail to develop knowledge and skills due to lack of competent teachers who

are able to use teaching and learning methods professionally. To some points the arguments of TEKU students lacks weight because some students who have come from the same school and have been taught by the same teachers among them are those who know how to write academic papers well and others do not. This situation indicates that the problem is not entirely the competence of the teacher but lack of personal effort of the student in studies. On the other hand, lack of competence of the teacher contributes failure of students to write academic papers professionally. With that logic, many educational institutions should put emphasis on changing the curriculum that allows teachers to focus on competence-based teaching in order to prepare students with ability to write academic papers well.

### 3.2 Inadequate Working Environments in Students' Previous Schools

Apart from competence of teachers, another aspect is working environment. The environment at work is a great incentive for employees to perform their duties with morale, commitment and professionalism. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) have explained that the teacher who works in difficult environment fails to employ variety of methods that facilitate learning and teaching. The existence of difficult environment for teachers leads to limited instructional materials, a situation that causes students to learn in a harsh teaching and learning environments. In addition, Miraj and Din (2018) state that the morale and professionalism of teachers is built by good working environment. A teacher who is paid a small amount of salary loses commitment at work. Moreover, Moore, (2012); Eboka (2017); Carrol (1992); and Ehneni (2017) have supported that a teacher needs a calm environment to work in order to teach professionally and with creativity. Many educational institutions that have difficult environment for teachers lead to dissatisfaction, demoralization and despair for teachers, something that makes them perform their duties below the required standard. However, some schools lack classrooms and tools for teaching and learning, something that prevents the teacher from directing learners in practice, especially the subject of academic writing with examples. Scholars above have discussed very beautifully that poor environment is very big incentive for the teacher fail to do work effectively. Yet they have failed to justify the fact that some teachers teach in a difficult environment still students do well academically. So, there is a very close relationship between the school environment and academic performance. There is a great need to take care of the school environment in order to improve academic performance including academic writing.

In my analysis of students' documents such as scripts of individual assignments, term papers, and essay questions at Teofilo Kisanji University to determine whether they focused on academic writing principles, I found out that many of them failed. Furthermore, I interviewed some of them to find out the challenges they faced when writing an academic paper; most of them complained about the environment of the educational institutions they came from not supporting teachers to teach with heart and commitment. Anwar, Khan, and Jabbar (2022) also joined the above argument that bad working environment for teachers removes motivation, confidence and better productivity in facilitating learning for students. The study's findings revealed a positive and significant correlation

between the working environment and job performance. Moreover, the working environment had a positive and moderate effect on teachers' job performance (Anwar, Khan, & Jabbar, 2022:63). The perceptions of students and scholars above have successfully identified the negative impacts of difficult working environment of teachers that can remove commitment, motivation, courage, and competence in the learning process. However, they have failed to justify the fact that there are teachers who work in a good environment but are naturally lazy to work. It would have been very useful if they harmonized the environment with the spirit of the teachers work from the heart. Therefore, educational institutions that student's study before joining Universities need to improve the learning and teaching environment to increases academic performance and make their students become good at academic writing.

Most teachers spent a lot of time thinking about the fate of their lives due to lack of basic needs instead of spending most of their time thinking about teaching methods that enable students to understand the lesson quickly. Mayaru (2015) joins scholars and students arguments above that poor working environment for teachers includes lack of living housing that leads teachers fail to fulfill their teaching duties; lack of housing for teachers near their work center causes poor preparations for student lesson Secondly, arriving at work late a situation that removes teaching morale, and thirdly, not completing the syllabus due to absenteeism a situation that creates a bad foundation for the student by not being taught important things especially in subjects that emphasis on academic writing.

The study by Masoon (2021) noted that the working environment of teachers is extremely important to them and, ultimately to their students; teachers are satisfied and intend to stay longer in schools with a positive work environment, regardless of the student demographic characteristics of the school. This statement means that environment is of the main determinants in school for the teacher to perform well or bad, an institution is supposed to establish the environment in order to bring out good academic performance.

In my conversation with one of the districts educations officers at Mbeya (Personal Communication, 13 December 2023), he emphasized that the working environment for the teacher is something important to bring efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out teaching duties. However, he questioned the government's efforts to improve students housing instead of starting with housing of above teachers. I conquer with the ideas of the education officer and Mayaru by comparing the efforts of the government with the wife's husband who starts with improving the housing of his children and does not care to improve the housing of his wife first. Massons argument above is very important in that a calm working environment is an important tool for improving the teachers' mental and physical stability. Hence, the good development of educational institutions is highly dependent on the stability of their working environment.

### 3.3 Improper Educational Qualifications of Teachers in Students' Previous Schools

Despite the inadequate working environment, educational qualifications of teachers also count greatly. Teachers are very important in the implementation of curricula and future curriculum development. An educational institution with teachers of good qualifications does better academically. Hill and Chin (2018) have explained that professional teachers enable accuracy in the learning process. The teacher can predict and ensure good understanding of the student based on cognitive assessment. Qualified teachers facilitate students learning quickly. Boabeng and Boaleng (2019) support the issue of the presence of the qualified teacher that it is a source of the student to benefit in learning. A teacher with good training knows how to use teaching strategies and methods. Moreover, the trained teacher has the ability to monitor the behavior and conduct of students on learning Mwesiga and Okendo (2018) add that improvements of student's performance and getting a better education demands the presence of teachers with a suitable level of education, who are able to observe the taboos and procedures of teaching and learning. Most qualified teachers are committed to their work to facilitate learning for students. Students' ability to understand proves the teachers' competence in teaching. Scholars above (i.e., Hill and Chin, 2018; Boabeng and Boaleng, 2019; Mwesiga and Okendo 2018) have argued well. I agree with them on their argument; especially when they say that qualified teachers know the right methods and strategies to empower students in learning. However, I do not agree with Boabeng and Boaleng (2019) that qualified teachers can monitor behavior; this is hardly true because some teachers are the ones who lead to teach bad behaviors to students. These days, the interaction between the student and the teacher has become great, a situation that influences bad habits that deprive the power of teachers to criticize the students' behavior. Therefore, educational institutions should look carefully at the qualifications of teachers who teach relevant subjects in order to increase the success of students especially in academic writing before joining universities.

In an interview with students (Personal Communication, 23 December 2023) at Teofilo Kisanji University, I found out that many students failed academic writing due to low level of education of teachers who taught them in schools they came from. A student from TEKU, in her words, said that "Schools I studied do not have teachers with great education in building student's ability in academic writing skills." In the interview, one student asserted, most teachers having low educational qualifications do not have adequate teaching methodologies. For a teacher who does not have good educational qualifications, getting a chance to teach is like a blind man leading a blind fellow (Personal Communication, 18 December 2023). Students added that in some schools they attended, teachers who taught them were just form six leavers who failed but were given important subjects and expected to enable students to become good academic writers.

Using unqualified teachers is very common in private educational institutions as part of avoiding large payments, especially when there is a shortage of teachers in the relevant subjects. To a lesser extent, unqualified teachers are used by government schools as volunteers, especially when there is a shortage of teachers in some

subjects. Ingersoll (1999) reveals that most teachers who are not qualified academically lack the competence to deliver good teaching to their students. However, many of them also teach subjects they have little background. On them. Machingambi, Oyedele, and Ckikwatare (2018) support Ingersoll that many students taught by unqualified teachers fail to do well academically. I am in line with the views of Ingersoll (1999) and Oyedele and Chikwatare (2018), especially when they say that unqualified teachers fail to use teaching methods effectively, something that leads to negative performances for students. Qualified teachers are very important in ensuring good understanding of students. Thereupon, the tears and sighs of students have directed them to teachers who do not have teaching qualifications as being the cause of them not being able to write effective academic papers. Hiring a teacher who does not have good criteria and qualifications is the same as assigning a vehicle to a driver who does not know the exact direction of the journey.

### 3.4 Lack of Creativity of Teachers in Students' Previous Schools

The good qualification of teachers should go hand in hand with creativity. Creativity in learning and teaching is very important because it creates new and valuable ideas. A creative teacher works independently and very differently (Ucar, 2022). Creativity of teachers builds critical thinking of learners. For teachers, creativity helps to design technical methods that help students get instructions easily and gain understanding quickly (Kaplan, 2019). Teachers are learning activators and designers in the sense that teaching is an art and a profession. Teaching is an art that requires high creativity to deliver a message to the learner. A teacher who lacks creativity finds it difficult to make good use of teaching profession to convey the targeted message on the concerned subject. A creative teacher meets the interests and needs of fast learners. Hence, Creativity is a teaching method that encourages students to be creative in their lives (Simpson, Newton, & Newton, 2022).

Many teachers who use creativity in their teaching are more successful in conveying message to the targeted audience. In addition, students like creative teacher because the methods they use to give information attract them and make them understand the topic very easily (Pishghadam, Nejad, and Shayesteh, 2012). Some teachers fail to be creative because they do not know the components of creativity in the teaching profession (Flanders, 2019). I strongly support the scholars above because they have touched on creativity which is one of the main pillars that can distinguish one person from another in all aspects of life. Basically, the creativity of a teacher reflects the reality of his or her thoughts and ideas. However, they have emphasized that the issue of academic writing is a very dependent creativity that starts from the teacher to the student. I really like Kaplan (2019) when he compared a teacher to an artist in the sense that it needs creativity to attract learners. In general, many teachers have lacked creativity in facilitating the learning of academic writing. In this era of competence-based teaching, teachers should be creative to simplify the process of learning. Teachers who prepare students to join universities should focus on building a foundation to students to be good academic writers.

In a conversation with undergraduate student at Teofilo Kisanji University (Personal Communication, 21 December 2023), he complained that many teachers of primary and secondary schools

where they studied lacked creativity in subjects involving academic writing, which was the reason for their understanding of academic writing being limited. At some point, students get bored listening to a teacher who is not creative in teaching. In his words he said, “most teachers had and are still forcing us to memorize what they teach word by word due to lack of enough creativity in facilitating learning”. Bloom and Briggs (2019) assert that creativity for a teacher is a technical method that makes ease for students to understand something taught. Moreover, as one student at TEKU said, most teachers who have low educational qualifications do not have teaching methodology. A teacher who does not have good educational qualifications to get a chance to teach is like a blind man leading a blind fellow (Personal Communication, 18 December 2023). The issue of academic writing has been demolished due to lack of creativity on the part of the teacher during teaching. Many students have suffered from the problem of not knowing how to write academically due to lack of creativity in teaching because their teachers have lacked the basis to recognize what creativity involved in teaching.

In addition, Scharyati, Laihad, and Suchyadi (2019) note that there is a very good relationship between creativity and teaching. A teacher who lacks creativity fails to meet current learning needs of students. Creativity in teaching strengthens students’ ability to become a good academic writer because creativity develops the students’ critical thinking. To a certain extent, I support the views of TEKU students and scholars above (i.e.: Bloom and Briggs, 2019; Laihad and Suchyadi, 2019) that among the things that bring efficiency and effectiveness in teaching and learning is creativity. Students and scholars have shown that the presence of creativity removes boredom for learners; it is a method that makes it easier for the student to understand the relevant topic and helps the teacher to meet the needs of the student easily. Along with giving good information about the importance of creativity in teaching and learning, it would be very good to associate the issue of a teacher with content and creativity. In a definition A teacher can be creative but lacks a good understanding of the material he or she has to present. Sometimes teachers fail to distinguish between humor and creativity in the classroom because most of them use the classroom as platform to be a funny place and not a place to deliver academic materials to students. Therefore, in order for a teacher to be seen in the competitive market in teaching and learning, creativity should be part of his or her life, both inside and outside the classroom.

### 3.5 Lack of Knowledge on the Use of Technology from Students’ Previous Schools

The creativity of teachers stated above works well if the use of technology is possible. Carstens, Mallon, Batainesh, and Batainesh (2021) state that the current education system struggles to keep up with the changes in the world of technology. Teachers are under pressure to provide teaching and learning based on technological changes. Educators are looking at technological devices that enable easy learning for students. Technology is an important part of students’ lives because of believing that life is technology. In addition, involving technology in the classroom proves positive results for student’s success in learning. Omar, Muhammed, and Belmasrou (2014) argue that writing is a complex issue that involves skills, processes, and strategies. Students need to master

writing skills in order to be successful academically. It means that the use of technology in teaching and learning is not limited in today’s world. Teachers use computers, tablets, smartphones and projectors as a way of aiding teaching to simplify the issue of learning for students. In writing, teachers connect the internet to computers to provide opportunities for students to get learning materials for better understanding.

Nagasubramani and Raja (2018) have highlighted the importance of technology in education with a logic that it makes students’ life easier and facilitates the learning journey as a tool that helps to give instructions during learning. Technology gives freedom and motivation to the student to learn writing skills at a high level and in easy ways. Ferdousi (2022) has also put an emphasis on digital technology to improve students’ academic and technical writing skills. Through technology, the student gets good access to learn to write in his or her time and with more freedom. The presence of modern technology enhances the availability of e-library which enables the student to find learning materials easily. Ferdousi added that a school that does not have advanced technology easily hinders the issue of learning for students because this era is not an era of teacher-centered learning but of student -centered learning. In Support of the arguments of scholars above, I argue that we live in a world of technology and a digital generation. Education and every sector should adapt to changes in science and technology. Technology has brought about many positive changes in the education sector including the availability of lessons for ease and changes of teaching and learning methods from teacher- centered to student centered methods. Hence, it is good to the government to establish technology to be used to bring about a revolution in education, especially to facilitate academic writing for students who have not yet joined universities. Teachers and educational officers should strengthen technology in schools, for examples the presence of digital library and online courses that enable distance learning.

In the interview with some primary and secondary school teachers at Mbeya city (Personal Communication, 26 December 2023), they said that many schools in Tanzania are behind the changes in science and technology. Even the methods and equipment used for teaching and learning are less compatible with the current world of Technology. In his own words, one of the secondary school teachers said many teachers use poor methods and outdated equipment to convey the current message (personal communication, 27 December 2023). Moreover, in the conversation with some Teofilo Kisanji University students (Personal Communication, 24 December 2023), they stated that the lack of modern technology in schools led them fail to know academic writing skills because in technology there are all kinds of academic resources that could help them gain various knowledge and skills.

When there is a lack of modern science and technology, it causes a shortage or lack of teaching and learning resources that would help them study and increase understanding beyond the teachers’ lesson notes. These days, teaching and learning resources are maintained through technology in the sense of an electronic library; unlike in the past when the library was found in physical buildings. In the other hand, students complained about the government’s efforts to distribute tablets to teachers, a situation that has led some teachers to keep music’s and put a guarantee on for borrowing things because

most of them studied in the days of analogy. In addition, they advised that it would be very interesting if tablets were held in schools to create an electronic library useful for students and teachers. In the study of Johnson, Jacovina, Russel and Soto (2016) they have joined the thoughts of students when they state that technology is a very big reason for shaping the education system today. Although the challenges of using technological tools are great for students and teachers, including the lack of skilled experts; there is absence of sufficient equipment and the presence of more students than the size of the class. Moreover, if the government is able to prepare a good procedure for using science and technology in the classroom that is compatible with the environment, it will greatly simplify the issue of teaching learning.

In the study of Kulesza, Dehondt, and Nezelek (2011) it was noted that technology in schools was currently important to keep up with the changes in the world. It means that technology has become a crosscutting issue that needs to be present in various sectors. However, the education sector is putting great effort in technology that will help to teach and learn easily because these days belong to the digital age. Muje and Jita (2020) have added that good education goes hand in hand with science and technology. At a certain point, education without technology becomes like a war because it requires students' great strength to understand the lesson and the teacher to be understood as to what is intended to teach. I abide with the arguments of scholars and TEKU students above because. However, I have doubts with the arguments made by Johnson, Jacovina, Russel and Soto (2016) that the government should improve the environment that is compatible with the changes in technology. The teaching and learning environment start from the place where students sleep. The above scholars have not made it clear whether the government can improve the housing of parents or guardians where students come from by improving technology. I think it would be better to be specific in their arguments to show what things could be improved in schools and homes. In reality, in order to raise the ability of students in academic writing before joining university studies, the government should set a strategic and action plan to strengthen technology in educational institutions.

### 3.6 Dilemma in Academic Instructional Language in Students' Previous Schools

The Creativity of teachers and development technology should be going hand in hand with the establishment of favorable academic instructional language. Precious and Lettiah (2020) have explained that the language of instruction is very important in building a student's competence in writing. These scholars did research in a secondary school in Zimbabwe and found that many students did not do well academically due to the presence of a foreign language of instruction. Zimbabwean students used to speak their mother-tongue language since were children. For students to understand academic writing in depth it has been a big challenge because they have failed to understand well the foreign language used to give instructions and in writing. Fatimah (2018) supports the issue of the language of instruction that it determines the academic performance of students. Most students lack a good understanding of academic writing due to difficulty in language. Students fail academic writing because they fail to use a foreign language to give explanations, the presence of complex vocabulary and they fail to develop new ideas

through a foreign language. In addition, Civan and Coskun (2016) have explained that non-native language has a negative effect on the academic success of students. The English language is very harmful to students because it makes them unable to understand the lesson properly. In the research done by Makondo (2018) and Peyton (2015) it was revealed that the language of instructions has become an obstacle for teachers to convey formal messages and for students to receive academically appropriate messages. The above scholars have done very well to show the importance of having a language of academic instruction that is compatible with the culture of the respective country. If the country decides to use non-native languages to academic instruction, it should ensure that it does not go against the norms and customs. Therefore, the presence of one language of academic instruction helps the student to be close to the language of communication in school. Sometimes it has been very difficult for students to be familiar with academic writing due to language problems.

The difficulty to use a foreign language in academic writing was vivid in the interview with students. In the interviews (Personal Communication, 28 December 2023) conducted at Teofilo Kisanji University with some undergraduate students, they said that "many students wished to be good academic writers but the language of instruction became an obstacle". However, students said that they had ideas about writing, but did not have a good basis to speak and write in a foreign language. Language is used by academics to convey messages; it can be in writing or in words. When it happens that the language that connects people is difficult, communication begins to fail and that is why even academic writing becomes difficult to understand. In a conversation with one of the Lecturers at Teofilo Kisanji University (Personal Communication, 27 December 2023), he said that foreign language such as English is the only reason which influences students to fail in academic writing. In Tanzania for examples, students spend a lot of time speaking native languages and Kiswahili during their growth; when they reach a stage of joining secondary school and colleges, the instructional language changes suddenly making the issue of learning difficult. Moshia (2019) joined the thoughts of the Lecturer from Teofilo Kisanji University that the problem of academic writing is partly caused by difficult English terminologies and weak English background from primary to secondary schools. Students lack confidence and competence in using English in classroom discussion as well as communicating with each other. Students have little vocabulary and their English grammar is poor. In addition, some teachers use difficult vocabularies and broken English which prevent students from understanding the content being taught. However, students use Kiswahili as the language of instruction in primary school which makes difficult for them to understand English in Secondary schools and colleges when are selected to join studies. Even, Ewie and Eshun (2015) found the language of education is crucial to learners' academic success. A nation whose native language is not the language of instruction in education looks for a language that can be used to give instructions to solve the communication problem in their education systems. Although the chosen language is often foreign to local students, something that makes it difficult to start learning lessons through the new language of instruction. Most student's see that schooling is difficult due to difficulties of the language of instruction, which leads some of them failing to achieve their goals by failing exams, and others making

decisions to drop out of school. On that basis, the language of instruction in education systems has ended the dreams of many students failing to understand what is being taught and some of them hating school completely.

The problem of language of instruction does not only exist for students but also affects teachers in the sense that they can teach students wrong concepts and make them receive incorrect instruction on the subject leading them answer examinations out of points. Dearden (2014) and Azarias (2022) have supported the view that English is used by many countries in Africa as a language of instruction in education systems. However, many teachers find it difficult to speak English fluently, eliciting interactions and explaining lessons. Due to teachers not mastering the English language well as the language of instruction, it is very difficult to convey message to students, a situation that leads many students to learn by memorizing and not understanding. I join hands with the thoughts of TEKU students, Lecturers and scholars above that language has become the main obstacle for the student to understand what is being taught and the student or teacher failing to convey the appropriate message in writing and words. A good basis for academic writing is language. So, one language should be chosen that the students will use during studies. This thing will help students to master the language well, which is the main bridge of academic writing.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper focused on challenges faced by undergraduate students in academic writing at Teofilo Kisanji University. It has determined that many undergraduate students fail in academic writing due to the bad foundation from educational institutions where they came from before joining universities. The reality has been shown that academic writing becomes difficult due to lack of competence of teachers, hiring teachers who do not have qualifications, bad working environment for teachers, lack of creativity, inadequate use of technology, and the dilemma in academic language of instruction. Therefore, it is my advice that the government establishes a strategic plan for all educational institutions at lower levels to empower teachers on academic writing to avoid students memorizing the taught content instead of understanding and practicing. Moreover, the curriculum in lower-level institutions should also be changed from knowledge-based teaching to competency-based teaching, which is more compatible with academic writing. Academic writing identifies a person, what he/she thinks, and how he/she will be in terms of academic abilities and skills. If the government does not put a considerable emphasis on academic writing, it will continue producing academics not able to compete in the global job market.

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### Author's Biography



**MARCO EDWARD** was born on 14 March 1989 at Kahama in Tanzania. He received his Bachelor of Arts with Education (BA Ed.) degree from Tumaini University Makumira in 2016, and his Bachelor of Divinity degree at Teofilo Kisanji University in 2022. He is currently a First Year student in the Master of Education program at Teofilo Kisanji University in Mbeya, Tanzania. Moreover, Edward is an ordained minister of the Moravian Church in Tanzania, Western Province Tabora