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Ethnographic Investigation of Academic Writing: Expectations and Practices in the MA TEFL *Advanced Writing* Course

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Abstract

The objectives of the present ethnography were three-fold: exploring the MA TEFL students' expectations of the Advanced Writing course taken as part of their coursework in the MA program, unearthing the actual classroom practices implemented, and eliciting any possible suggestions for its improvement. To this aim, stimulated recall and ethnographically-oriented qualitative research were used to interview nine MA students at IAU, Isfahan Branch and unravel their perspectives concerning the writing course they had passed. Non-participant observation was also used to triangulate the data and verify the students' responses regarding the expectations/problems of the course and the classroom practices besides cyclical data analysis to find the recurring patterns and themes in the data. Results showed the most serious problems were lack of enough writing practice during the course, limited class hours, and lack of feedback on students' writings. The prevalent classroom practices, on the other hand, were covering the APA writing style, teaching how to write the different sections of a research report, and working on essay writing during the first few sessions of the course. Finally, the top suggestions made by the students were adding practical writing activities to the course, having more writing courses, taking advantage of group work for students to monitor each other's work and provide peer feedback, and offering the course right before students take their thesis rather than in the first semester of the MA program. These findings can heighten the educator's awareness and contribute to a better understanding of students' needs/expectations regarding academic writing. Overall, by addressing the gap in understanding advanced EFL learners' expectations, this study can have practical implications that directly impact the teaching of writing. It can guide curriculum development, inform instructional approaches, enhance learner motivation and engagement, promote learner autonomy, and improve instructional materials, ultimately leading to more effective writing instruction and improved outcomes for advanced EFL learners.

Keywords: advanced writing course, classroom practices, ethnography, students' expectations and suggestions, MA TEFL

1. Introduction

Since English enjoys the status of the international language, in today's business and academic world, knowledge dissemination and communication occur primarily through English, whether in an oral or a written mode. Writing in a second language has always been a thorny challenge for L2 writers, in both business correspondence and academic writing purposes. The fact that L2 writing is one of the most demanding and complicated skills for EFL learners to learn is affirmed by many scholars (Barkaoui 2007; Myles, 2002; Suwannasom, 2001) as it requires the process of conveying writers' thoughts to readers' minds. Furthermore, writing has been argued to be a preponderant skill for EFL learners by many experts (e.g., Cumming 1998; Kroll, 2003; Matsuda, 1998; Silva & Matsuda, 2001 as cited in Chuenchaichon, 2014).

Chronologically speaking, the teaching of L2 writing has gone through different approaches of product-based, process-based, and genre-based approaches, respectively. In the product-based approach to writing, the students, provided with the required vocabulary and structural patterns often in context, use a model paragraph and mimic the style to develop a rather similar product. What counts is the produced text, rather than the process through which a text is achieved. The writers often do away with such matters as writing process, purpose, and audience, while paying attention to the final product (Silva, 1990)

To prevent the pitfalls of the product approach to writing, an alternative approach, often known as the process approach, was introduced. In the process approach, according to Hyland (2003), the students are encouraged to freely explore and experience the process of writing, which involves the three stages of pre-writing, drafting, and revising. The teacher's major responsibility is to take the right measures to assist the students in going through each stage of this recursive process and in guiding to guide them to work collaboratively and write creatively in a learner-centered environment. Finally, in the genre-based approach to writing, students are taught the linguistic and rhetorical features of a particular genre (or simply called text type) such as a business letters or a scientific paper. The students are then expected to recognize the purpose, the linguistic resources, and the rhetorical features of a specific genre, and be able to create a text in that given genre since they have accessed the tools they need for that particular text type (Hyland, 2003).

One of the approaches taken for improving the quality of writing is ethnographic investigation of academic writings. According to Paltridge et al. (2012), ethnography, quite literally, means examining people and writing about their cultures. American Anthropological Association's definition of ethnography views ethnography as involving "the study of human behavior in the natural settings in which people live" that aims to provide a "description of cultural system or an aspect of culture based on fieldwork in which the investigator is immersed in the ongoing everyday activities of the designated community" (American Anthropological Association, 2004). The desire to gain and report on an insider's understanding of the perspectives and meaning-making practices of the group or individuals being studies is a key driver of ethnographic intention. Key features of an ethnographic approach from the researcher's perspective are participation and observation—immersion in the setting under investigation, a degree of sustained involvement in the setting, and an attempt to understand the participants' perspective from the inside. Whereas positivist researchers who use questionnaires and surveys assume that they already know what is important, participant observation makes no such assumptions. Ethnography can, therefore, allow for what (Hall, 1980) referred to as the possibility of "surprise"—that is the emergence of knowledge that is not predetermined by the original research position or paradigm. Ethnography, therefore, adopts a fly-on-the-wall observation procedure and proceeds inductively to develop ideas about a phenomenon.

Paltridge et al. (2016, p. 1) remark that "ethnographically-oriented second language writing research …aims to gain insiders' perspectives on writers' experiences, writing practices, and the context in which academic texts are produced and assessed." According to Paltridge et al., through ethnographic analyses, students can be taken out of the contrived environments of writing classrooms to examine ways in which writing is socially situated; ethnographies provide a way of unveiling the knowledge, skills, and ways of writing that are necessary for becoming members of academic communities. This study, therefore, aimed to use ethnographically-oriented research to unearth the perspectives, feelings, and expectations of the students who took the Advanced Writing course in the academic setting of Iranian universities, and to unpack the classroom practices in such a course.

2. Literature Review

A plethora of research studies in different parts of the globe have dealt with the thorny issue of how to ameliorate students' English writing. While research on EFL writing skills exists, there are notable gaps that need to be addressed. Filling these gaps can contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by EFL learners, inform

instructional practices, and ultimately enhance the effectiveness of writing pedagogy in EFL contexts. As an illustration, Santoso (2010) conducted a research study to test and develop genuine instructional procedures, in which the researcher made use of scaffolding to enhance the learning of EFL writing skills in an effective hybrid learning context in Indonesia and found that the intervention bolstered students' interest, boosted their autonomy and engagement, and gave rise to their improved writing performance. In another study, Chong (2002) intended to demystify the question of what some of the influences reflected in the children's writing were. To this end, a case study research was designed in which some 12-year-old students in a writing class were recruited; it was revealed that the pedagogical choices of the teacher, e.g., their feedback to the students' writing and the way of dealing with writing errors, had a huge impact on helping them write in English.

Felix and Lawson (2006) evaluated the impacts of an integrated one-month-long bridging course for postgraduate overseas students, and focused on the students' academic writing skills in relation to English grammar, expression and spelling as well as on structure, argument and critical analysis. Quantitative data were collected from an experimental group and two control groups, one comprising overseas peers, the other of local postgraduate students. Qualitative data were also collected from the experimental group via journal entries and regular discussions. Results showed a significant improvement in expression and structure in the experimental group's writing from pretest to posttest, with a significantly higher marks given by independent raters to posttest writing. Qualitative results from journal entries indicated that students began their studies in a state of gross over-confidence and began to experience doubt and concern before reaching a more accurate estimate of their abilities at the end of the course.

Rickard et al. (2009) also conducted a cohort study and used a questionnaire survey to evaluate the effectiveness of a one-week Writing for Publication course combined with a monthly writers support group to increase publication rates of nursing academics. Two year pre- and post- submissions increased from 9 to 33 articles in peer-reviewed journals. Publications per person increased from a baseline of 0.5 to1.2 per year. Participants reported increased writing confidence and greater satisfaction with the publishing process. Peer support and receiving recognition and encouragement from the mentors were also cited as incentives to publish. The authors believed writing for publication is a skill that can be learned, and that an evaluated model of a formal writing course, followed by informal monthly group support meetings, can effectively increase publication rates.

In another study, Ma (2019) maintained that second language writers who are unprepared to engage in disciplinary academic writing require institutional language support services such as individual (or one-on-one) consultations with learning advisers, who identify students' specific writing issues and provide personalized advice. Despite being resource-intensive, these services may have significant impacts on thesis and dissertation writing. She evaluated the effectiveness of individual consultations through student learning experiences, and analyzed the reasons for service use, evaluated students' perceived impacts of consultations on thesis and dissertation writing, and explored their views on service improvement. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 13 EAL doctoral students enrolled in an Australian university. Results showed that individual consultations were operated in four different formats and participants accessed consultation services because their learning needs were not met in group settings or they had identified writing issues. Participants reported pedagogical and psychological impacts, and provided practical suggestions for service improvement in terms of timing and adviser availability.

Larcombe et al. (2007) evaluated the successful pilot of a Thesis Writers' Circles program offered to Education Ph.D. students at the University of Melbourne in semester 2, 2005. The analysis focused on the particular needs of the participating students that were felt to be well-met by this model of support. They identified two distinct but inter-related themes: firstly, the challenge of developing writing skills to a level sufficient to meet the demands of preparing a research thesis; secondly, the importance for research higher degree students of building confidence as apprentice academic writers. In relation to the latter theme, they identified the benefits of community participation and peer-collaboration in working towards the aim of consolidating a thesis-writing identity. They found that thesis writers' circles have distinct advantages compared with other forms of candidature support, making them a valuable supplement to both conventional supervision practices and generic English language and thesis writing programs. Their report then affirms the importance not only of equipping international and non-English speaking background students with writing tools and strategies, but also of creating opportunities for all postgraduate research students to receive (and offer) non-judgmental feedback on work-in-progress within a discipline-specific learning and discourse community.

Conducting research via a genre-based approach to writing to develop academic/business English writing, Foley (2013) found that the academic/business English writing of the students significantly ameliorated. The research recommendations encouraged writing teachers and also students to recognize the significance of genre-based writing

instruction and the development of writing in academic/business English. Dong (1998) provided a report on the results of a survey of 169 graduate students and their thesis/dissertation advisors at two U.S. institutions about thesis/dissertation writing in science. The study compared article compilation and traditional five-chapter thesis/dissertation writing, and revealed non-native students' lack of social networks and use of writing resources as well as their suggestions for a fully-fledged and improved thesis/dissertation writing supervision. It also examined the impact of language-related and cultural differences on non-native students' thesis/dissertation writing. Findings from this study revealed the need for teaching knowledge transformation skills in EAP classes, establishing student support networks, and a collaboration among disciplines on audience/genre/discipline-specific writing instruction.

Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi (2013) conducted a case study to explore L2 writing instructors' perceptions of the needs of second language writers. To this end, the authors administered a perception survey of teachers of both mainstream and L2 sections of first-year composition courses. Their findings revealed that writing teachers did recognize the needs of L2 writers and were keen on working with this student population. Nonetheless, many teachers including those who taught L2 writing sections did not attempt to meet the needs of L2 writing students. It was also found that teachers' ability to satisfy L2 writers' needs was constrained by factors such as program policies, lack of required teaching/assessment materials, and lack of professional preparation opportunities. Their study suggests that understanding the specific needs of teachers leads to meeting the needs of their students.

Paltridge et al. (2012) examined the nature of the written component of doctoral degrees in the visual and performing arts submitted for examination in Australian universities, as well as a range of practices and trends in the kinds of texts that were presented in doctoral submissions in these areas of study. The study involved a nation-wide survey of doctoral offerings in the visual and performing arts, the collection of a set of 'high quality' doctoral texts, and interviews with both doctoral students and supervisors. Their article reports on two doctoral projects that can be seen to represent opposite ends of a continuum in the set of doctoral works that were examined. The results implied that teachers of advanced academic writing ought to be careful about opting for approaches to thesis writing pedagogy which hinge upon generic or prescriptive models of what a Ph.D. in the visual or performing arts is supposed to look like. Besides, writing instructors ought to be cognizant of the specific conditions of production and reception of the Ph.D. dissertation in the visual and performing arts within the context of their own universities.

Wang and Yang (2012) explored problems and strategies of six MA students in a TEFL program in learning to write a thesis proposal. Multiple sources of data (such as interviews, questionnaires, observations, and portfolios) were employed. The results of data analysis indicated that the challenges the students faced in writing their proposals included choosing a research topic, deciding over the design of the proposed research, mastering the genre of the thesis proposal writing, and drafting a critical literature review. The students had differing attitudes towards getting help from their supervisors. They, however, managed to complete their research proposals by holding discussion sessions with their supervisors, observing their peers' presentations on research proposals, and reading relevant literature.

In the context of Iran, Nekooeian (2013) described the design, implementation, and evaluation of principles of writing biomedical research paper course. The course, prepared based on an extensive search of the literature and books on writing biomedical research papers, was offered as an elective course to Ph.D. students at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences in the second semester of 2011-2012 academic year. The structure and function of various sections of a paper and publication ethics were discussed in lecture and practical sessions over a period of 12 weeks. The course was then evaluated using a self-designed questionnaire. Results revealed that the majority of students gave the highest score (20) to the content and implementation of all sessions of the course. However, most of them believed that the allotted time to the course was not enough, and suggested that it should be increased to 32 hours (equal to two credits). Besides, almost all the participants believed that overall the materials lectured were comprehensive, the practical sessions were important in learning the lectured materials, and the course was useful in advancing their abilities and skills to write papers. The evaluation of the present course showed that it was able to increase the participants' knowledge of the structure of scientific papers, and enhanced their abilities and skills to write papers.

Sojoodizadeh et al. (2020) examined the expectations of 362 medical students in three program groups (medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy) in learning professional English during their coursework. A reliable and valid questionnaire was distributed among students who had a specific professional English course in various semesters in the faculty of medicine. Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses were conducted and the following results were obtained: the most frequent expectation from medical students was for their teachers to translate texts into the Persian language and help them to comprehend medical texts and final examinations, including translating from Persian to English as well. The results also found a difference between the expectations of male and female students, with female students having higher expectations than male students. There was no significant difference among the students of the three program

groups (medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy) for total expectations or evaluation. However, there was a significant difference between the medical and pharmacy students. The researchers then concluded that measuring student expectations is a critical factor in addressing English language learning, including professors' knowledge and interest, of students' various abilities in English for specific purposes.

Taking the review mentioned above of the related literature in mind, Research on writing skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has revealed several gaps that warrant further investigation. In fact, there is a lack of comprehensive studies focusing on specific aspects of the writing process, such as culture, context, ideas and perspectives of writers, organization, and coherence of text based on these factors. While some research has been conducted on overall writing proficiency, there is a need for more targeted investigations into the specific challenges faced by EFL learners during different stages of writing. This study intended to employ ethnographically-oriented research to academic writing experiences of MA TEFL students who took the Advanced Writing course and were involved in the process of writing scientific papers or MA theses/proposals. More precisely, this study sought to unravel the expectations of the students of the advanced writing course they took, and their perspectives regarding the current practices in this regard, not to mention any possible suggestions to improve the quality of the course. In this regard, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What writing instruction do MA TEFL students expect to receive in order to be prepared for disciplinary requirements of writing in academic contexts?

2. What writing instruction do MA TEFL students receive in practice in the MA advanced writing course?

3. What suggestions do MA TEFL students make for better implementation of the MA advanced writing course?

3. Methodology

The research in hand was a qualitative research study, drawing on an ethnographic perspective to capture the realities of an MA TEFL advanced writing course from the viewpoints of the MA students who took it and proceeded to write academic assignments such as papers, research proposals and theses.

3.1 Research Design

Utilizing an ethnographic perspective, this study adopted the "ethnographic principle" (Hammersley, 2006, p. 9) of examining the participants' perspectives and experiences from their own emic/insider viewpoints. To gain access to our participants' emic perspectives, the focus is on the meaning they attached to their attitudes, perceptions, viewpoints, and understandings, and we tried "to make sense of what is significant" (Lillis, 2008, p. 367) to our research participants in their emic/insider social worlds.

Investigating our participants' emic perspectives, we used non-participant observation and ethnographic interviewing (Heyl, 2001; Spradley, 1979) and particularly used in-depth stimulated recall interviews sessions (McKay & Gass, 2005). This type of interview is especially helpful in "capturing participant perspectives" (Hammersley, 2006, p. 9) and "describing and understanding the meaning of central themes in the life-worlds of the interviewee" (Kvale, 1983, p. 175) based on the stimuli provided to help them recall their lived experience.

Using the participants' ethnographic perspective implies carrying out a small-scale study, which is often criticized with respect to the transferability of ethnographic findings (Patton, 2002). It represents data elicited from a small sample, but that their subtle account of the realities in the local invites readers from the global context to reflect and use the findings in their own settings. In this study, by focusing on a small (yet information-rich) sample of participants in a particular educational setting (IAU), it is aimed to present a rich ethnographic description of emic perspectives of the participants of the study, which hopefully will cast light on issues of academic writing by MA TEFL students in the context of Iran's higher education.

3.2 Participants

Nine information-rich MA students from Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch were asked to take part in this study. They were information-rich in the sense that they could provide an ample amount of information to the researcher (Hashemi, 2014). The selected students were information-rich in that they had passed the MA TEFL course Advanced Writing and were busy writing their academic stuff such as papers, research proposals, and/or theses. Indeed, another criterion that could affect the students' selection was their willingness to participate in this study. Thus, the available students who were willing to take part in the question sessions were identified from among a larger pool

of students, and were frequently contacted for the purpose of data elicitation. The information regarding the participants of the study is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. The Participants of the study

Students' Names	Gender	Age	Place of Origin	Prior Education
Atefeh	Female	25	Isfahan	Translation
Elnaz	Female	27	Isfahan	Polymer engineering
Leyli	Female	40	Isfahan	Nuclear physics
Mahboobe	Female	28	Isfahan	TEFL
Maryam	Female	35	Isfahan	Translation
Marziye	Female	29	Isfahan	Computer engineering
Nahid	Female	43	Isfahan	Translation
Nooshin	Female	26	Isfahan	Translation
Zahra	Female	37	Khorasgan	Law

As seen in the Table 1, all the students were female, aged between 25 and 43, and living in Isfahan. Five of the nine participants, five had completed their BA in a discipline relevant to language studies. In contrast, the other four had irrelevant-to-language educational backgrounds.

3.3 Instrumentation

To answer the study's research questions, the researchers chose ethnographic semi-structured interviews as the main method of data elicitation from the students. The number of times the students were interviewed depended on when data saturation took place, which occurred when collecting more and more data would not contribute to the conclusions drawn from the already-formed patterns in a qualitative research study (Hashemi, 2014). The semi-structured interviews were not necessarily conducted in English, and the students were free to use their L1 or L2 as the mandatory use of L2 in interviews might run into the problem of data underrepresentation (Mackey & Gass, 2005). These semi-structured interviews were organized around a set of their Advanced Writing course and the actual classroom practices in their classes.

Furthermore, since the selected students passed their writing course in the preceding semester(s), to help them remember what went on in their class, stimulated recall procedures (Mackey & Gass, 2005) were employed. Through stimulated recall, the researchers asked the students to bring with them whatever they had from their writing class (e.g., notes, pamphlets, books, test samples, etc.) to help them recall what they expected to do in class and what they did in the class. As for the data gathered through non-participant observation, the researchers asked a few of the students to give them the voice recordings of the sessions in the Advanced Writing class when their teacher was teaching them the writing lessons. Luckily, some of the students kept the audio recordings of those lessons, which the researchers then analyzed to find about the realities of the writing classes in the MA TEFL program.

3.4 Procedures

As it was previously mentioned, nine information-rich MA TEFL students from IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch who volunteered to cooperate were selected as the participants of this study. Care was exercised to select those students who had passed their Advanced Writing course and were busy writing a research proposal or an MA thesis. The data from the students were elicited through non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews which were designed to tap into the students' views regarding their expectations of the course, the actual classroom practices, and the suggestions for the improvement of the course. To help the students recollect as much information as possible regarding their course, stimulated recall procedures were employed where the students brought along their notes, pamphlets, and/or books to the interview sessions so they could recall more about what they had done throughout the course. The data from the interviews were transcribed and coded as the research was being conducted. When data saturation took place, the data collection process came to a halt. The details of the interviews are described below:

This choice of the semi-structured interview was based on the ethnographic and qualitative nature of our study. As Patton (2002) puts it, "qualitative inquiry–strategically, philosophically, and therefore, methodologically–aims to minimize the imposition of pre-determined responses when gathering data" (p. 353). Hence, in-depth interviews aimed to offer a unique space to participants in that they could "themselves produce accounts of their world" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 124) while "talking freely with an attentive listener" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 129). Keeping these considerations in mind, in lieu of expecting from the interviewees' specific answers to a fixed inventory of pre-formulated questions, we prepared for the interviews by constructing a relatively flexible list of topics that could allow us to lead the conversation with our participants in directions conducive to exploring our research objectives.

In this study, the coding and analysis of the data took place based on cyclical data analysis (Mackey & Gass, 2005). That is, the first round of data collection and analysis was done to see if discernable patterns would emerge from the data or not. Then, the second round of data collection commenced and this process continued until we were quite sure the right patterns and conclusions were obtained. The same data analysis technique was employed to analyze the data from the audio recordings of the classes (i.e., the non-participant observation data). Simple frequencies and percentages were used to report on the findings of the study.

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Interviews

As it might be recalled, nine students who were involved in the process of thesis/proposal writing were interviewed, and the classes were observed through non-participant observation to see if the observations converged with the data provided by the students or not. The results of the interviews for each student is reported as follows:

Atefeh

Our interview with Atefeh boiled down to a number of interesting ideas; she believed that the class, generally speaking, was more theoretical than practical; she expected to be given hands-on training and to be asked to write, say, an Introduction or a Literature Review when the teacher taught those topics. She believed that what was delivered to them as the course material was great (she, for instance, mentioned that their teacher had told that in the Methodology section of a thesis, they should write about the design of the study, the participants and their characteristics as well as the sampling procedure, the materials and instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures), but the problem was that they received no practice writing such as research section. This problem, she believed, might be attributed to limited class time and large class size; The class would meet once a week, 90 minutes each session, with more around 30 students. In this case, she argued, it would be far from possible to receive practical writing lessons and activities. Even if the teacher gave them practical assignments, it would be next to impossible to provide feedback on those bulky assignments. Regarding the problems of the course, she reiterated that knowing about the contents of the thesis chapters, rather than the practice of writing, received utmost importance. She said her thesis supervisor expected her to know how to write a thesis, and whenever he saw Atefeh's writing problems, he would, out of desperation, scold her for those problems and Atefeh would return home in tears.

Regarding the classroom practices, Atefeh again complained that they did not receive practical work. She said there was an overemphasis on APA writing/referencing style. However, she stipulated that as far as conceptual underpinnings were concerned, they received a good coverage of all that was required to write a paper/thesis. She also affirmed that the lessons they received were great and their teacher was competent and sophisticated. As to the suggestions for the writing course, Atefeh called for more writing practice in classes which are small enough for the teacher to provide feedback to all students. She suggested writing a small-scale (even hypothetical) research paper in this course to help students feel the real problems of thesis writing to some extent in that course and tackle those problems as much as possible. She said while writing her thesis, she had a mentor (Sahar) who had just defended her thesis who was constantly with her to help her write. She thus, concluded the important role of supporting students write by a more experienced peer/teacher. Finally, for this to take place, she suggested having two MA TEFL Advanced Writing courses, one in which the conceptual backgrounds of how to write are presented and one in which writing is practiced in class.

Elnaz

Contrary to Atefeh, Elnaz expected more practice with APA; she believed APA exercises were done in haste. She also believed there was enough time on the course to cover all that was planned in the course syllabus and all that was needed to write an academic piece of writing. As for the classroom practices, she restated that all the topics in the

course syllabus were covered in this course. She believed she took some really useful notes and class recordings so that whenever she ran into trouble, she would consult her comprehensive notes to resolve her writing problems. Elnaz was quite content with the course, and she was of the opinion that even if the course had been practical, no one would have completed the writing assignments (due at least in part to large class size and the impossibility of providing feedback). She made a mention of another writing teacher's class in which the teacher assigned writings, yet no one ended up writing those assignments (perhaps because those assignments went unmonitored and there was no feedback on them so the students did not take them seriously).

Leyli

Leyli referred to mastering the APA writing style as a thorny problem in this course; she said there was no ample time to get the hang of the APA style. She further complained that there were far too many materials to be covered in just one course, which met only once a week, only an hour and a half a session. Concerning the classroom practices, Leyli said the first few sessions of the course were spent on essay writing and addressing the mechanics of writing (e.g., punctuation, use of the hyphen, dash, quotation mark, etc.). Then the teacher took up teaching of what students needed to know for writing thesis chapters. What was particularly useful to her was that after teaching a lesson (say, Methodology section of the thesis), the teacher asked the students to go to the library and find a thesis to see if everything was in line with what was mentioned about that thesis section, and to see if there were any problems in those theses or not. However, to her dismay, there was no monitoring and feedback on this activity (for which Leyli had some suggestions as we will see below). She said she was happy because they were provided with a good coverage of reference writing, and because she could take some really handy notes, which were detailed enough to help her in nearly all the stages of writing her thesis. She affirmed she learned a lot in the course, particularly when the concepts were taught with examples and writing samples.

The suggestions made by Leyli were interesting to us. Firstly, not unlike Atefeh, she wished they had had two writing courses: Writing 1, in which they could be advised how to draft a paper/thesis and what to include in each part therein, and Writing 2, in which they would be instructed on how to revise a paper/thesis and provide references. She also suggested that the students be given writing practice right after they are taught a research section (e.g., Introduction). She also mentioned it would be desirable if the teacher could give all the students a topic and pursue the students' writings throughout the course. Finally, and most interestingly, she suggested using group work for writing practices (if they indeed took place in writing classes) and for those library activities they had (which went unmonitored); she believed working in a group could provide support, which some students indubitably needed, and would provide feedback on each other's activities.

Mahboobe

Not much new information was provided by Mahboobe as what she said was exactly similar to some of the other ideas presented by the other students. As an illustration, she referred to examining the theses in the library as a useful, educational, and entertaining experience. She also said that she could collect a pile of handy class notes to which she could refer whenever she needed to. She was particularly delighted to have learned a lot about punctuation rules in the course. Nonetheless, like most of the other participants in this study, she longed for the practical writing of the paper/thesis sections they were taught each session in the course.

Maryam

The recurring theme of not having practical writing activities was also observed in the data elicited from Maryam. She complained that the course overemphasized the mechanics of writing, the APA writing style, and references. She said there were too many textbooks, some of which they did not have time to study. She mentioned the good experiences of the first few sessions, when they practiced essay writing, rather than academic paper/thesis writing, and they emailed their assigned paragraphs every week so the teacher gave feedback on their writings and showed their problems on the screen; she, however, believed this was still insufficient to help them develop their academic writing skills since the assignments were essays rather than academic pieces of text.

Among her suggestions was that the Advanced Writing course should not have been given to the MA students during the very first semester of their MA program. She suggested that this course be given to students when they are close to writing their thesis, when they feel the need to write academic texts (i.e., the third semester of their studies). She said it would have been better if they could teach them how to write (through Writing 1 in the first semester) before they could teach how to revise what they have written (through Writing 2 in one of the following semesters). Writing in groups, where students could receive help from their peers, was another suggestion made by Maryam.

Marziye

Marziye believed that she did not face serious problems in writing her thesis; she said it was not a big deal, and that every student could write a thesis had she a few sample theses. She said she passed the course and she never needed to revise the course materials because her supervisor catered her with a few theses from the previous students, and by looking at those theses, Marziye could figure out how to write her own thesis. Among what she found useful in classroom practices were focus on references and teaching how to write table titles and figure captions. She also liked the pointers they received regarding verb tenses in the abstract, introduction, and methodology, and the results sections of the paper/thesis. Also she found guidelines on how to write in-text citations and punctuation rules useful. She made no specific suggestion for the Advanced Writing course, except the recurring suggestion that practical writing would help, and there was no need to worry about how to write; when one begins to write, s/he will find the way.

Nahid

Nahid stated that she learned a lot in the course, but she admitted that the course materials had not been instilled; she had to review her notes whenever she needed to write a part of her thesis. She said the course instructor gave them a checklist of what to do (and what to write) in the course and it would suffice to consult that checklist and write your thesis; she meant that checklist could satisfy all the students' needs when it comes to writing a thesis. Nahid did not welcome the three sessions or so which were spent on knowing how to write references; she said it was a waste of time since there are reference management software programs like EndNote and Mendely, which can save students' time and effort in writing complicated reference lists. Furthermore, she expected that this class could inform them and show them the way they needed to traverse in order to approve their proposals, since she was confused by the bureaucracy in place in the department/university in the way of approving a research proposal.

Nooshin

Nooshin's overall evaluation of the course was positive as she made a mention of the good content they received in the course; she admitted that she based her thesis on what she learned in this course. She believed that APA writing style was also well-covered, yet there were some remaining parts which went untouched. The only problem she saw with the course was that it was more theoretical than practical. Among Nooshin's suggestions, we found that (since a lot of books were introduced but not thoroughly covered) if the teacher forced the students to study the whole book (in that case the APA book), it would be certainly better. She offered a solution for the problem of not having practical writing (which we believe emanated from the teacher's inability to provide feedback on the students' writings): using an online cloud (i.e., an internet folder) could be very effective since students could upload their practical writings on this platform; the students could then be assigned to give feedback on each other's work. Another of Nooshin's suggestions was that the Advanced Writing course and the Research Methodology course should have been offered to the MA students for their third semester, when they take thesis writing more seriously; offering these two courses in the first semester and then experiencing a 2-semester time lapse before beginning to write their proposals/theses would make all the efforts the teachers and students made in those two course useless.

Zahra

Zahra was also one of those lucky students who did not encounter serious difficulties in writing her thesis. She said she had taken and passed the Advanced Writing course, but she never had to get back to her notes for help because her supervisor provided a sample thesis file for her in which everything was in place and she just had to make some completions in order to have her thesis. She said, for example, the acknowledgments, abstract, approval page, sample table of contents, and all other things were there for her, and the only thing she needed to do was to write her own materials in the blanks. Concerning the classroom practices in this course, she believed that instructions on how to write references were very applicable and useful (that is perhaps because the references were not in the word file her supervisor gave her!), and that informing the students of the fonts, page margins, and the APA writing style was really helpful. The summary of the students' perspectives on their perceived problems/expectations, classroom practices, and suggestions is provided in what follows.

4.2 Problems/Expectations

The problems and course expectations mentioned by the nine participants in this study are tabulated along with their frequencies in Table 2:

Table 2. Course problems and students' expectations

No.	Problem/Expectations	Frequency	Percentage
1	Insufficient practical writing activities	3	21.42%
2	Large class size	1	7.14%
3	Limited course hours	2	14.28%
4	No feedback (on occasional writings or on library sittings)	3	21.42%
5	Too many materials/books in just one course	2	14.28%
6	No internalization of the materials; they need reviewing when one wants to write	1	7.14%
7	Difficulty of the APA manual	1	7.14%
8	Insufficient practice with the APA activities	1	7.14%
	Total	14	100%

Table 2 shows that the most serious problems based on the students' perspectives were the lack of feedback on students' writings and the insufficiency of enough writing practice during the course which was explicitly mentioned by Atefeh, Maryam, and Nooshin. Other serious problems were the limited class hours and too many materials/books in just one course. These problems could also be seen in the pie chart in Figure 1 (with the percentages rounded up for the purpose of clarity).

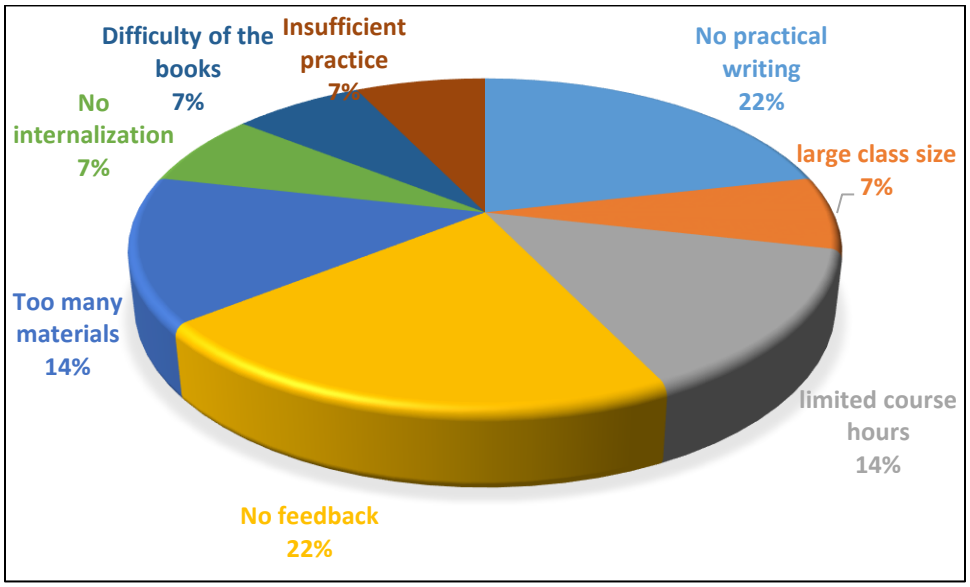

Figure 1. Students' problems in the advanced writing course

The pie chart also reveals that having no practical work and receiving no feedback were the two major problems for the students, and they expected to be given hands-on training and receive feedback on what they wrote or did in this writing class. Classroom practices, as reported by the students and as observed through non-participant observation, yielded the results which are summarized in Table 3 in the following section.

4.3 Practices

The classroom practices mentioned by the nine participants in this study are tabulated along with their frequencies and percentages in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Classroom practices in the advanced writing course

No.	Classroom Practices	Frequency	Percentage
1	Beginning the course by essay writing	3	12.5%
2	Covering the different sections of research and how to write them	5	20.83%
3	Good coverage of the APA writing style	6	25%
4	Asking the students to go the library and examine theses therein	2	8.33%
5	Emailing the essays to the teacher for feedback and class discussions	1	4.16%
6	Essay writing rather than academic writing assignments	1	4.16%
7	Focus on references, punctuation, and other mechanics of writing	3	12.5%
8	Providing useful notes, e.g. on verb tenses in different parts of research	2	8.33%
9	Providing a handy checklist for students to check their work as they write	1	4.16%
	Total	24	100%

The dominant classroom practices in the MA TEFL Advanced Writing course included covering the APA writing style ($f = 6$), teaching how to write the different sections of a research report ($f = 5$), placing emphasis on the revision of the written work, that is adding references correctly and rectifying punctuation and other mechanics of writing ($f = 3$), and spending time on essay writing during the first few sessions of the course ($f = 3$).

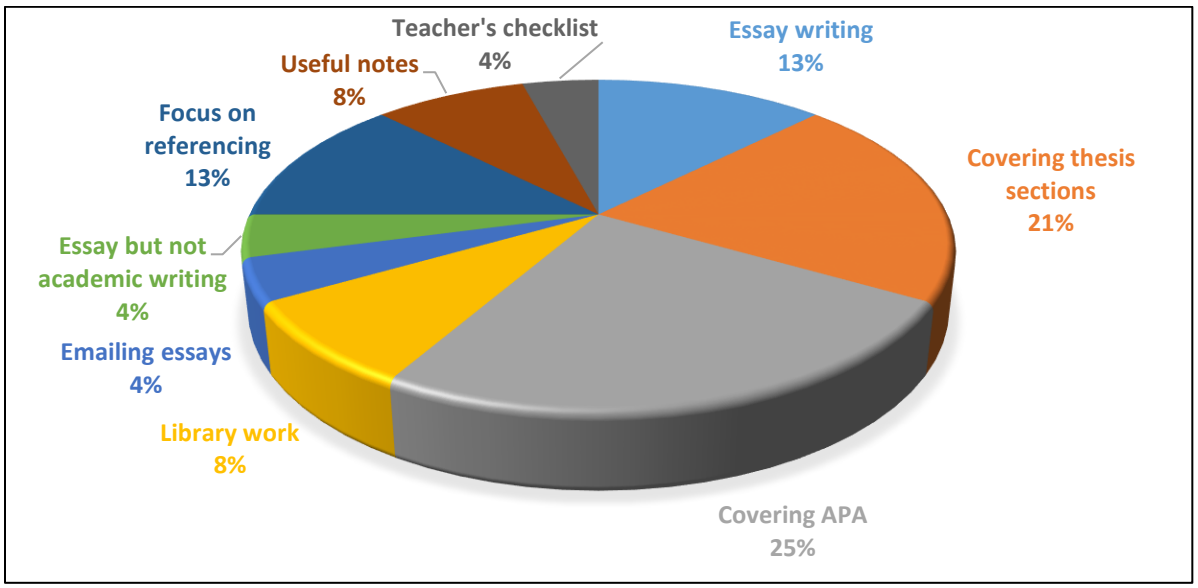

Figure 2. Classroom practices in the advanced writing course

The visual representation of the classroom practices shows that covering the APA manual and covering the contents of the different parts/chapters of a thesis took most of the class time in the course.

4.4 Suggestions

As it was found out above, the students were asked to give suggestions which could possibly improve the quality of the MA TEFL Advanced Writing course. These suggestions along with their frequencies and percentages are lined up in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' suggestions

No.	Students' Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lowering the class size	1	4.76%
2	Increasing the class hours	1	4.76%
3	Splitting the course into two conceptual and practical courses	2	9.52%
4	Writing a small-scale research paper/thesis	1	4.76%
5	Practical writing (of each research section right after it is taught)	3	14.28%
6	Developing a hypothetical research topic into a research study during the course	1	4.76%
7	Integrating group work into classroom practices	2	9.52%
8	Teaching students how to write before teaching them how to revise	2	9.52%
9	Taking advantage of reference managers like EndNote and Mendeley	1	4.76%
10	Updating students on the process of approving a proposal	1	4.76%
11	Forcing the students to study the whole (APA) book rather than working on some parts of the book and leaving some parts untouched	1	4.76%
12	Offering the Writing course in a different semester (preferably in the 3rd semester) when the students are close to writing their theses	2	9.52%
13	Using an online cloud/platform so students upload their writings and give feedback on each other's writings	1	4.76%
14	Using students to monitor each other and provide peer support and feedback	2	9.52%
	Total	21	100%

The suggestion with the highest frequency ($f = 3$) was the integration of practical writing activities in the Advanced Writing course. There were some other suggestions like (a) having two writing classes instead of one writing class in the first of which the students are instructed on how to draft a proposal/research study, and in the second of which they learn how to revise, (b) taking advantage of group work for students to monitor each other's work and provide feedback, and (c) offering the course right before students take their thesis (i.e., in the third semester). Figure 3 also shows the percentages of the above-mentioned suggestions through a pie chart.

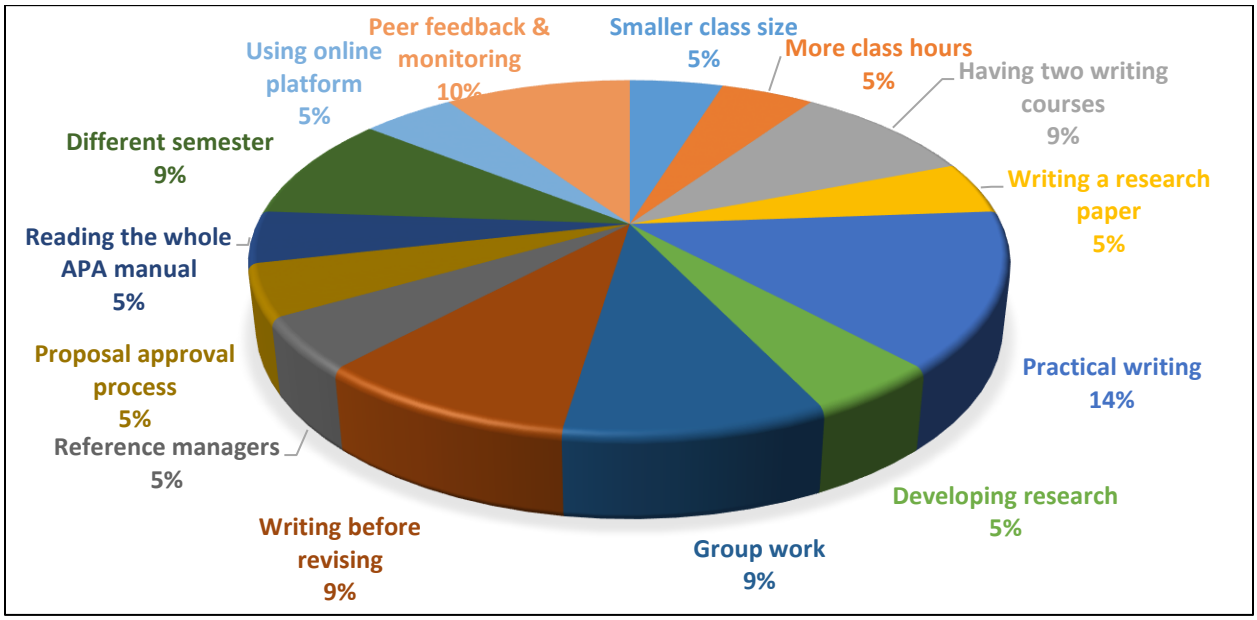

Figure 3. Students' suggestions for the advanced writing course

Figure 3 shows that among the top student suggestions were the inclusion of practical writing in classes, arranging for peer feedback and monitoring, writing a real (though small-scale) research paper, offering the course in a different semester, and having two writing courses instead of one (one for learning to write and the other for learning to revise).

5. Discussion

The discussion of the results obtained for the three research questions of the study is presented in what follows:

5.1 Addressing Research Question One

It was previously mentioned that the students expected to be given more hands-on training on academic writing. They wished they had been provided with feedback on their written performance. Other expectations also did not realize (or at best were partially realized) and caused problems such as the limited class hours, having to read too many materials, large class size, insufficient practice, the difficulty of the books, and no internalization of the materials taught during the course.

A closer look at these problems may trigger one to think that most (if not all) of these problems are rooted in one core problem: The fact that there is not enough time to assign practical writing activities and provide feedback on those activities might be at least in part due to the fact that there are around 30 MA student in a class, and it is no surprise that the teacher cannot make time to provide feedback on the students' writings; this being so, she may decide not to assign any practical writing activities because it is crystal clear that having students write something when it is supposed to go unnoticed by the teacher does little (or even no) good to the students. The students, in that case, may not even take other assignments by the same teacher (or even by a different teacher) seriously because they assume that any upcoming assignment is going to be treated the same way. This is exactly what happened in the writing class which Elnaz was reporting on in her interview.

The large class size could also be the source of other problems: if there were fewer students sitting in the same class, the teacher had more time working with each and every student, and the students would not end up complaining that they had limited course hours. We believe they think they had limited class hours because they were not taken care of by the teacher. Had we had smaller class sizes, there would have been enough time for the teacher to support students writing in a more caring way. As was suggested by the students in this study, and as we will reiterate in the discussion of the third research question, the students called for smaller class sizes for a course like advanced writing or teaching practicum in which the students have to write or teach in a practical way. Even the 'no internalization of the materials' theme that emerged in the results of the study, we believe, has its roots in large class sizes; since there are no opportunities for the students to practice what they learn, and since there is not enough time for the teacher and assign practical writing activities and provide feedback, it is quite normal that what students learn in this course cannot be

instilled and enter the realm of oblivion after a while; that is why they have to review their notes whenever they need to write a piece of academic text. Likewise, that is why the students maintained (in their suggestions) that offering the course in the first semester of the MA program is useless, and it would be better to offer the course in the third semester, right before they are supposed to write their proposals/theses.

The researchers do believe that many of these expectations could be met and many of these problems could be obviated if there were smaller numbers of students in writing classes. The problems of too many materials/books in just one course and difficulty of the APA manual are not far from unusual in every university, we suppose. With the change of student admission policies which have been in place for more than a decade, it has become easier and easier for applicants to enter universities. These students are not sometimes qualified or proficient enough to pursue their studies, but for the financially-oriented policies of the universities for survival, they have to keep those unqualified students rather than expel them from the programs that require great enthusiasm, motivation, and hard work. We had heard our professors were talking about the time when they were MA/PhD students; they had to study several books and write at least a term paper for each course; now everything has changed. The students keep nagging if the teacher decides to cover more than a book in a course, and there are scarcely courses in which teachers assign term papers. And this is a disaster, we firmly believe, to hold graduate courses/programs this way in a nation as wide as Iran, with more than 2800 universities here and there.

Looking back at the literature, and on the studies conducted on the problems that graduate students had with academic writing tasks, Wang and Yang (2012) explored problems and strategies of six MA TEFL students in learning to write a research proposal for their theses and found that the difficulties the students encountered in writing their proposals included choosing a research topic, deciding over the design of the proposed research, getting the hang of the genre of the thesis proposal, and writing a critical review of the literature. The students had different attitudes toward receiving support from their supervisors. They, however, managed to complete their research proposals by having discussion sessions with their supervisors, observing their classmates' presentations on research proposals, and reading the literature relevant to their topics.

The students in the present study did not have many of the problems in Wang and Yang (2012) 's study; they could get hang of the genre of the thesis/proposal since there was a good coverage of the materials/moves the students had to write in different sections of a research proposal/thesis. Moreover, in their study, it was found that holding sessions with supervisors and observing peers' presentations on research proposals helped the students obviate their proposal writing problems. In a similar vein, it is contended that receiving help from a supervisor or from a more knowledgeable/experienced peer could immensely facilitate the journey of writing a thesis. Atefeh was seen to report in a pleased manner that she had a mentor (Sahar), who had just defended her thesis and was there for her to help her with writing here thesis. Marziye reported that her supervisor provided her with several good sample theses, and all she had to do was to scrutinize the samples and write her thesis in a like manner. Similarly, Zahra mentioned that her supervisor had given her a thesis with all the required sections in place, but with blanks that had to be filled with the information belonging to a particular study; the only thing she had to do was to fill out those blanks. It is not intended to judge what these supervisors did, but what counts is that providing assistance by supervisors is immensely helpful in writing a thesis.

5.2 Addressing Research Question Two

The results obtained for the second research question of the study both from the interviews and the non-participant observation of the course revealed that the classroom practices mainly involved explaining the APA writing style rules and recommendations and explaining how different sections of a thesis or a paper, say Introduction, should be written. Other practices included essay writing, overemphasis on referencing in research, library work and examining previous theses therein, and talking about the teachers' checklist of thesis writing dos and don'ts.

It is indeed rewarding to teach students how to write the different parts of a thesis and to revise/edit it based on the rules and regulations suggested by an institution like the APA. Still, we were wondering if there would be a guideline for course teachers to be informed by authorities and policy makers of what is supposed to be covered in the course or not. We thought of checking the course syllabus proposed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in the curriculum planned and developed for the MA program of TEFL. To our chagrin, we found a bare description for the course less than half a page, the English translation of which is shown in Figure 4.

Advanced Writing

Credits: 2

Course type: Theoretical

Requirements: No

Aim: Gaining skill in writing different genres focusing on thesis writing

Syllabus: 34 hours (17 sessions) of advanced writing and analyzing of papers/essays of different types (narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative)

The seal

of the Ministry of Science

and Higher Education

Figure 4. Advanced writing course syllabus by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education

The only good thing about this syllabus is that it assumes the teachers of the course are competent enough to decide over the details of their own syllabi. However, it is a shame that the syllabus offered to all the universities in Iran for an MA course is only as long as half a page with descriptions which even fail to reach 50 words. Luckily, the writing class we observed at IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch was taught by an experienced teacher, and very generally speaking, all the participants of the present study liked the what and how of the course, but there are chances that a different teacher teaches the same course in a different university and in a different way, with disappointingly little gains for the students. In a study by Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi (2013), the authors reported that a majority of composition courses were taught by those who were not specialists in the field of L1 composition or L2 writing, and their levels of awareness had to be tested and verified. Part of their findings showed that many teachers, including those who taught L2 writing, did not make any special efforts to meet the unique needs of L2 writers.

The classroom practices existing in the class we observed could be described with reference to the famous triad of writing instruction approaches: product-based, process-based, and genre-based writing. The essays the students wrote and emailed to the teacher for analysis in the classroom could be roughly regarded as being written in a product-based manner since the product approach, based on Gabrielatos (2002), underscores the logical construction and arrangement of discourse forms, in addition to putting the focus on paragraph models, grammar and usage rules, not to mention vocabulary development. Of course, they were not strictly written in a product-oriented manner since Gabrielatos remarks that the product approach to writing drives students to imitate a model text, which is more often than not introduced and analyzed at an early stage in class, and this was missing in the classes that we observed. In addition, Hyland (2003) proposes that writing instruction comprises a four-stage process that focuses on language structure, and it includes (a) familiarization: learners are exposed to certain grammatical structures and vocabulary items, usually through a text, (b) controlled writing: learners manipulate fixed patterns, often from substitution tables, (c) guided writing: learners imitate model texts, and (d) free writing: learners use the patterns they have developed to write an essay, letter, etc. These stages we did not observe in the essay writing portion of the course.

The practice of writing in this course could be regarded as process-based as well since the writing process involves the three stages of planning, drafting, and revision. While many students might have done away with the first planning stage, they did draft their paragraphs and in the classroom, the teacher tried to show them how to revise their written productions. In a sense, however, this practice could not be deemed to be process-based since the process approach requires that writers create and modify their ideas while they write, and it implies that writing is recursive (Hyland, 2003), while this recursion was missing in the writing practice in this class.

Apart from the first few sessions, the rest of the course could be characterized by a genre-based approach to writing instruction since it revolved around the genre of thesis writing. In this approach, students are first provided with an explanation of linguistic and rhetorical features. In the wake of an explicit understanding of linguistic components and rhetorical patterns, students will be able to learn how texts are structured and how grammar and vocabulary are combined to construct meaning. Then, they come to see that different texts have different purposes, and thus different organizations. This is what exactly took place in the classroom, for example, when the teacher explained that an introduction has the three moves of (a) establishing a research territory, (b) establishing a niche, and (c) occupying the niche. As Hyland (2003) believes, the genre-based approach presents linguistic and rhetorical forms in an integrated way within a context since writing occurs in particular cultural and social contexts that require different grammatical choices. One meritorious feature of this approach is that it emphasizes the enhancement of writing

proficiency through teaching linguistic features and appropriate rhetorical patterns which are accepted in the target society and which are required at the higher education level. That is probably why the course teacher decided to use this approach to teach the students how to write their theses.

5.3 Addressing Research Question Three

The third research question of the study dealt with the students' suggestions for improving the course. The finding pertaining to this research question included suggestions such as having more practical writing activities, receiving peer feedback and monitoring, offering a theoretical as well as a practical writing course, offering the course in a different semester, integrating group work into the classroom practice, teaching how to write before teaching how to revise, having smaller class size and longer class hours, developing an actual topic into a research report, using online platforms for cooperation and peer support, reading the whole APA manual, debriefing the process of approving a proposal, and using reference manager programs like EndNote or Mendeley.

The fact that the students longed for feedback and monitoring, group work, and online platforms for cooperation and peer support could be said to be congruent with the results of the study conducted by Dong (1998), who reported the findings from a survey of graduate students and their thesis/dissertation advisors at two U.S. institutions about thesis/dissertation writing in science. By comparing the article compilation and the traditional five-chapter thesis/dissertation, this study found nonnative students' lack of social networks and use of writing resources and their suggestions for an adequate and improved thesis/dissertation writing supervision. More precisely, the finding that pointed to establishing helping networks for nonnative English L2 writers is in line with the suggestions the students made in the current study regarding having support groups and social helping networks.

Additionally, by suggesting that they liked to have group work and peer support added to their classroom practices, the students implied their inclination for the academic socialization model of L2 writing, which is supported by constructivist education, social psychology, genre and discourse studies (Lea & Street, 1998). Moreover, as the students stated as their problems the lack of practical writing practice, limited class hours, and large class size, they proffered relevant solutions of adding practical writing activities to the classroom practices, and arranging for longer course hours as well as smaller class size.

We believe that the suggestion of offering the course right before the students need to write their thesis (i.e., in the third semester of the MA TEFL program)' deserves due attention. This course, as it is known, is intended to prepare the MA students to write academic writing (be it in the form of a term paper, research article, proposal, or thesis), and it has always been offered in the first semesters because as of the first semester of the program, the graduate students are supposed to write term papers and then continue their academic writing career by drafting their proposals and theses, not to mention the publishable papers they may need to submit to scientific journals of the field. This course and the Research Methodology course thus have always been offered to students in the first semester of the MA program.

Now, however, everything has undergone dramatic changes and, as mentioned above, universities have unfortunately lowered their standards, and many unqualified students are admitted to graduate programs. These so-called students, who enter the universities in large numbers, engender large class sizes of pupils who are not able to do a fraction of what an undergraduate student could do a couple of decades ago. They cannot write term papers for every course right from the beginning of their graduate program (and even if they can, the teachers cannot afford to make time to give feedback to all these students' written performances, as mentioned above). That is why they take the course Advanced Writing in the first semester, but do not practice writing academic stuff until the fourth term, when they have to submit a research proposal and embark on writing their theses. Hence, we suppose Nooshin made a good suggestion by saying that the Advanced Writing course should be postponed until the time when the students need to write their proposals/theses. The researchers think the curriculum is flexible enough to conform to the drastic changes the universities have witnessed and undergone. Consequently, we agree to this suggestion and we would like to make the voices of these students heard on this proposed plan. Finally, given the widespread application and popularity of technology in the lives of nearly all people (especially those involved in the area of education), we think it would not hurt if we could arrange for online platforms and provide student support groups, or use computer technology (or more specifically what is called Research Tools) for different purposes related to writing a research study (e.g., using EndNote or Mendeley for reference management purposes).

6. Conclusion

The present research study aimed to investigate the expectations/problems, classroom practices, and suggestions of the MA TEFL students regarding the Advanced Writing course that they have to take as part of their MA coursework. We used ethnographically-oriented interviews and non-participant observation (via a voice recorder) to tap into the perspectives of nine MA students at IAU, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch who had passed the course and were involved in the process of writing their theses. After recording their voices, we transcribed and made notes of their opinions. By using cyclic data analysis, we spotted the recurring patterns and themes in their ideas. After theoretical saturation took place, we categorized their perceptions regarding their expectations/problems, classroom practices, and suggestions for the improvement of the course. The main problems of the course were problems of not having enough practical writing activities and crowded classes which did not last long enough for the students to master academic writing. The prevalent classroom practices were introducing different parts of a thesis and explaining what should be written in each section, as well as covering the APA publication manual for the purpose of enabling the students to revise their work in terms of mechanics of style and provide references correctly. The top suggestions of the students included forming student support groups where they can receive feedback on their written productions and be provided with peer support, and offering the course in the third, rather than the first semester of the MA program.

These findings opened up the windows of our thinking to a whole bunch of new ideas and suggestions that curriculum designers and course teachers might not have thought of before. Given these new findings, changes could be hoped to take place in the way the course is taught, and in the manner and time the course is offered. Through conducting this research, we intended to contribute to the field of Academic Literacies to investigate what the expectations of novice academic writers were regarding the writing instruction to which they were exposed, and what in reality they underwent in their writing modules. This could result in a list of options of support (as mentioned above) which could be furnished for them to improve the current mainstream writing instruction practiced in their classes. This study made a contribution to the literature by catering new empirical data from the under-researched context of academic writing, particularly with reference to the expectations, practices, and suggestions for future writing classes from the MA TEFL students. This study problematized the classroom practices of MA advanced writing to stimulate the teachers and policy makers to rethink and reconsider the needs of the students (as well as to sensitize the students to the requirements of an academic writing course) to trigger a much-needed change.

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