

***The Effect of Structured Academic Vocabulary List (AVL)
Instruction on University EFL Students' Writing Accuracy
in English for Academic Purposes (EAP).***

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Abstract:

Many university EFL students struggle to select the appropriate vocabulary while producing academic texts. This study aims to assess the effect of structured academic English vocabulary instruction on university EFL students' writing accuracy. A quantitative pre-test and post-test design was employed, involving 30 undergraduate EFL students, with AVL instructional sessions conducted between the pre-test and post-test. The results showed a noticeable improvement in students' writing quality, particularly in vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and overall writing proficiency following the instructional intervention. The study also highlights the importance of AVL instruction in EAP courses and encourages curriculum designers to incorporate AVL-based instructional courses into university EFL programmes. It also shows that although movies, songs, and everyday conversations may help students to develop their general English, they are not sufficient to develop their academic vocabulary required for EAP writing.

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The relatively small sample size is acknowledged as a limitation, and further studies are encouraged to examine this topic with a larger and more diverse population.

Keywords :English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Academic Vocabulary List (AVL), Writing Accuracy, Pre-test/Post-test, Structured Vocabulary Instruction.

Introduction

The growing globalization of the English language has reinforced its role as the primary language of higher education and scientific research worldwide (Jenkins, 2013). Consequently, mastering academic English has become fundamental for EFL students seeking to thrive in university settings, especially since a substantial proportion of research articles and textbooks are published in English. Among the language skills for academic success, academic writing is often considered the most challenging.

Writing a strong academic text is not merely about avoiding grammar mistakes; it is about selecting the appropriate vocabulary, structuring arguments logically, and presenting ideas clearly and coherently (Brun-Mercer & Zimmerman, 2015).

Many EFL university students struggle to use the appropriate academic words, which negatively affects the quality of their written work. This is where English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs become particularly important.

Rather than relying on incidental vocabulary acquisition through movies, songs, and social media, the (EAP) programs provide explicit instruction in academic vocabulary (Skoufaki & Petrić, 2021).

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Structured resources, such as the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL), give learners a core set of high-frequency academic words that are applicable across a wide range of disciplines. Although the importance of vocabulary is well established, and the academic vocabulary list (AVL) has been recognized as a valuable resource for academic writing (Gardner & Davies, 2014). Limited empirical evidence is available regarding the effectiveness of Structured Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) instruction in enhancing EFL students' writing proficiency.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address the gap by examining whether targeted vocabulary instruction improves university EFL students' grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and overall writing quality.

Literature review

1. English for academic purposes (EAP): English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has evolved from a branch of English language teaching into a well-established field that prepares students for the linguistic and academic demands of higher education (Jiang & Hyland, 2026). As English has become the dominant language of international scholarship, EAP has assumed an increasingly important role in helping students develop the academic communication skills required for successful participation in university contexts (Jiang & Hyland, 2026). Academic writing is widely recognized as a central component of English for Academic Purposes because it equips students with the skills required to communicate effectively in academic settings. Beyond generating ideas, successful academic writing involves planning, drafting, revising, and editing, while

maintaining accuracy, coherence, and adherence to academic conventions (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

2. Academic Vocabulary and Academic Vocabulary List (AVL): Academic vocabulary refers to the words that occur frequently across academic texts and disciplines but are less common in everyday conversation. These words enable students to express ideas precisely, construct arguments, engage effectively in academic discourse (Coxhead, 2000; Gardner & Davies, 2014). A substantial body of research has consistently identified limited academic vocabulary as one of the major challenges faced by EAP learners, often affecting their ability to comprehend academic texts and produce effective academic writing (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Evans & Green, 2007; Evans & Morrison, 2011). To address this challenge, researchers have developed a range of academic word lists that prioritize high-frequency vocabulary commonly encountered in academic discourse. These lists are based on the principle that a relatively small proportion of words accounts for a large percentage of academic texts, making explicit instruction in these items an efficient approach to vocabulary learning (Nation & Waring, 1997; Coxhead, 2000). Building on these developments, (Gardner & Davies, 2014) introduced the academic vocabulary list (AVL) a Corpus - based word list designed to provide broader coverage of academic vocabulary across disciplines. Evaluating the relevance of the AVL to university students writing to students' writing, Durant (2016) found that it achieved substantial lexical coverage across academic texts with the use of AVL items increasing as students progressed to higher academic levels. These findings support the value of AVL as a useful resource for developing academic vocabulary, although

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disciplinary differences suggest that generic word lists may not fully address the vocabulary demands of every field (Durant, 2016).

3. Writing Accuracy and Structured Vocabulary

Instruction: Writing is often regarded as the most challenging skill language skill for learners. Is consistently research shown that EFL learners encounter various writing difficulties, particularly in vocabulary use, grammar, verb tense, prepositions, and word choice. Error analysis has therefore become an important tool for identifying learners' linguistic weaknesses and informing instructional practices (Phuket & Othman, 2015). Furthermore, intervention studies have demonstrated that explicit instructional approaches can significantly improve EFL learners' writing quality, including vocabulary use, language accuracy, organization, and overall writing performance (Teng, 2022). Collectively, these findings suggest that instructional intervention can positively influence students' writing performance, providing a strong rationale for investigating whether Structured Academic Vocabulary list AVL instruction can similarly enhance the writing accuracy of university EFL students.

4. Research gap: Aforementioned studies have established the fundamental role of academic vocabulary in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and demonstrated that explicit instructional approaches can improve students' writing performance. Additionally, the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) has been recognized as a valuable corpus-based resource for supporting academic vocabulary development disciplines

(Gardner & Davies, 2014). However, despite these contributions, limited empirical research has specifically investigated the effect of Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) instruction on university EFL students' writing accuracy using an experimental pre-test/post-test design. Moreover, evidence from university EFL contexts, particularly in Algeria, remains scarce. Consequently, further research is needed to determine whether systematic instruction based on the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) can significantly enhance students' grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and overall writing quality. The current study addresses this gap by examining the effect of structured academic English vocabulary instruction on university EFL students' writing accuracy.

The research was anchored by the following two research questions:

- 1.1.** To what extent does structured academic English vocabulary instruction improve university EFL students' grammatical accuracy and vocabulary use?
- 1.2.** Does this instructional approach improve the overall quality of university EFL students' academic writing?

To address these research questions, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1. Structured academic English vocabulary instruction improves university EFL students' grammatical accuracy and vocabulary use.

H2. The instructional approach improves the overall quality of university EFL students' academic writing.

Methodology

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Participants in the current study were undergraduate EFL students at an Algerian university. They took part in a quantitative research study that lasted throughout the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 21 and had comparable academic backgrounds. They voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and completed all the stages of the instructional intervention. A pre-test required participants to write an essay selecting the topic they wanted based on their prior knowledge. The researcher taught the participants eight instructional sessions, each lasting 25 to 30 min on the Google Meet platform. The instructional materials were based on the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) developed by Gardner and Davies (2014). Selected academic words were explicitly taught during the instructional sessions. After the intervention, a post-test asked participants to write on the same essay topic again, applying the post-instructional knowledge. The pre-test/post-test essays were compared to evaluate changes in students' grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and overall writing quality.

Data analysis

The data obtained from pre-test and post-test writing tasks were analyzed to determine the effect of Structured Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) instruction on university EFL students' academic writing. The participants' essays were evaluated using an analytic scoring rubric with maximum score of six (6) points. One point was assigned to each of following criteria: vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, coherence, punctuation, article usage, and the use of connectors. The scores obtained in the pre-test and

post-test were then compared to identify changes in students' writing performance following the instructional intervention.

Results

The comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores revealed a noticeable improvement in students' writing performance following the structured academic vocabulary list (AVL) instruction. In the pre-test, most participants obtained scores of 2/6 or 3/6, and none achieved the maximum score of 6/6. The most common weaknesses included the use of informal language, grammatical errors, lack of coherence, incorrect article usage, punctuation errors, and inappropriate use of connectors. Following the instructional intervention, the majority of participants obtained scores of 4/6 or 5/6, demonstrating a clear improvement in their overall writing quality.

Table 1: Comparison of students' writing performance before and after the instructional intervention.

Writing criterion		Maximum score	Pre-test performance	Post-test performance
accuracy	Vocabulary use	1	0.2	1.00
	Grammatical	1	0.2	0.75
	Coherence	1	0.5	1.00
	Punctuation	1	0.5	0.75
	Article usage	1	0.5	1.00
	Connector usage	1	0.2	0.75
	Overall writing quality	6	2.2	5.25

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This table represents the comparison between the pre-test post-test writing performance of the participants across the six (6) assessment criteria. The findings indicated an overall improvement in writing quality following the Structured Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) instruction. Improvements were observed in vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, coherence, punctuation, article usage, and the use of connectors. The overall writing score increased from 2.25 in the pre-test to 5.25 in the post-test, suggesting that the instructional intervention positively influenced students' writing accuracy and academic writing performance.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effect of structured academic English vocabulary instruction on university EFL students' writing accuracy. The results indicate that the instructional intervention positively influenced students' writing performance, thereby providing positive answers to the two research questions and supporting the proposed hypotheses. Following the instructional sessions, participants demonstrated greater control over academic vocabulary and produced more accurate and better organized written texts. This improvement suggests that explicit instruction based on the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) can play an important role in developing the linguistic competence required for academic writing in English.

The positive effect observed in this study is consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction within English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Teng (2022), for example, reported that explicit

instructional approaches significantly improved EFL students' writing quality, particularly in terms of language accuracy, vocabulary use, and overall written performance. Similarly, Gardner and Davies (2014) highlighted the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) as a corpus-based resource designed to support learners in acquiring the academic vocabulary required across university disciplines. The improvement observed in the current study therefore suggests that integrating structured academic vocabulary instruction into EAP courses can enhance university EFL students' writing accuracy and strengthen their ability to produce academically appropriate written texts. Although many university EFL learners are exposed to English through movies, television, and other forms of digital media, such exposure alone is unlikely to provide the linguistic competence required for English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Informal media primarily introduce learners to everyday expressions, conversational language, and colloquial vocabulary rather than the precise and discipline-specific vocabulary expected in academic writing. This contrast became evident in the present study, where participants' pre-test essays contained frequent informal expressions and limited academic vocabulary despite their previous exposure to English. Following the structured instruction based on the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL), noticeable improvements were observed in both vocabulary selection and overall writing quality. This observation suggests that while movies and other informal resources may support general English language development, they cannot replace systematic academic vocabulary instruction for learners who are expected to produce accurate and academically appropriate written texts.

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Despite these encouraging outcomes, this study has certain limitations. The relatively small sample size and the inclusion of participants from a single university limit the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is encouraged to involve larger and more diverse EFL populations to further examine the effectiveness of structured academic vocabulary instruction in different educational contexts.

Conclusion

Academic writing in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) requires more than grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge. This research contributed to this field by showing that the structured instruction based on the AVL supports university EFL students in producing more accurate and academically appropriate written texts. The study also highlights the value of integrating explicit academic vocabulary instruction into EAP courses to strengthen learners' writing competence. It is recommended that curriculum designers incorporate instructional courses based on the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) into EAP programmes for university EFL students to better prepare them for the linguistic demands of academic writing. It is hoped that this study will encourage further investigation involving larger samples and different EFL contexts.

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