

Undergraduate Students' Writer's Block in English as an Academic Language: Causes, Coping Strategies, Needs

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Abstract

This study aims to explore writer's block in the tertiary education context and draws from 644 senior English language and literature students' self-reports on producing academic texts in English. A mixed-methods survey design was used to collect data from the participants. Findings showed that both internal and external causes of writer's block were at work, yet external causes were moderately more influential, while students produced argumentative-critical and expository essays and were influential in the drafting stage of the writing process. Findings also revealed that students pursued continue-to-write and avoid-writing strategies in different combinations to cope with writer's block and needed to expand their knowledge and experience in drafting, planning, using academic language, coherence, and smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Lastly, findings highlighted the need for clear instructions, studying sample texts, and feedback from teachers to overcome writer's block. In light of these findings, several pedagogical implications were suggested.

Keywords: Causes of writer's block, coping strategies, English as an academic language, English language and literature departments, students' needs

Lisans Öğrencilerinin Akademik Dil Olarak İngilizcede Yazar Tutukluğu: Nedenler, Başa Çıkma Stratejileri, İhtiyaçlar

Özet

Bu çalışma, yüksek öğretim bağlamında yazar tutukluğuna ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır ve 644 son sınıf İngiliz dili ve edebiyatı öğrencisinin İngilizce akademik metinler üretirken yaşadıkları yazar tutukluğuyla ilgili görüşlerinden yararlanmaktadır. Katılımcılardan veri toplamak için karma yöntemli bir anket tasarımı kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, yazar tutukluğunda hem iç hem de dış nedenlerin etkili olduğunu, öğrenciler tartışmacı-eleştirel ve açıklayıcı akademik metinler üretirken dış nedenlerin kısmen daha etkili olduğunu, yazma sürecinin ana taslağı oluşturma aşamasında ise yine dış nedenlerin etkili olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Buna ek olarak, bulgular öğrencilerin yazar tutukluğuyla başa çıkmak için farklı kombinasyonlarda yazmaya devam etme ve yazmaktan kaçınma stratejilerini izlediklerini ve taslak oluşturma, planlama, akademik dil kullanımı, tutarlılık ve cümleler arası geçişler konusunda bilgi ve deneyimlerini genişletmeye ihtiyaç duyduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Son olarak da bulgular, yazar tutukluğunu aşmak için net talimatlara, örnek metinleri incelemeye ve öğretmenlerden gelen geri bildirimlere duyulan ihtiyacı göstermektedir. Bu bulguların ışığında, çeşitli pedagojik çıkarımlar önerilmektedir.

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Anahtar Sözcükler: Yazar tutukluğunun nedenleri, başa çıkma stratejileri, akademik dil olarak İngilizce, İngiliz dili ve edebiyatı bölümleri, öğrenci ihtiyaçları

Introduction

When students are asked to write down their ideas, thoughts, or feelings on paper in their own words, when they are assigned to write an essay within a week or two, or when they learn that they will write a short essay for an exam, teachers often encounter similar scenes with unhappy faces, howls of protests, sighs with discontent and complaints. These student reactions can be associated with apathy and a desire to gain a lot with little effort. However, such an association might also be considered taking the easy way out because these student reactions remain the same despite the changes in the setting, time, and characters. As Dela Rosa and Genuino (2018) argue, this situation is particularly prevalent in contexts where students' writing performance in L2 is encumbered by several writing issues. In the case of the English literature (ELL) departments in Turkey and worldwide, writing in L2 may become a heavy burden as these students are evaluated and graded through their writing. Therefore, "writing in English is no longer a language skill to practice and reinforce the target language in tertiary-level academic writing" (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019, p. 89). Besides, these assignments are often beyond expressing their personal accounts; instead, those students are expected to write essays or assignments following the rules and principles of academic writing. Considering academic writing appears as a barrier for even graduate students in the US, many ELL undergraduate students may have negative dispositions toward academic writing, such as turning their assignments in late, leaving them undone or incomplete (Fernsten & Reda, 2011; Huerta et al., 2017). Such dispositions can also be associated with writer's block (Rose, 1984; Boice, 1985). As a phenomenon affecting students' writing performances and quality, writer's block is relatively understudied. This study investigates the writer's block phenomenon, particularly in ELL departments, where the utmost significance is attached to academic writing.

Theoretical Framework

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Academic Writing

English for academic purposes (EAP) lends itself to higher education contexts (e.g., undergraduate and graduate), where it is mainly used as the medium of instruction and research for non-native speakers. EAP refers to an educational approach and a set of beliefs about teaching the language to those who need it for study purposes (e.g., understanding the delivery of the course content, reading and researching academic sources) and performing academic tasks (e.g., conference presentations) (Charles, 2013; Jordan, 1997). From this stance, EAP is distinguished from general English courses because it begins with the learner and the situation, whereas general English begins with the language (Hamp-Lyons, 2001). Initiating this type of teaching with

learners and the situation entails a needs analysis to determine for what academic purposes English is taught. Therefore, EAP is often responsive to learners' subject-specific and general academic needs, yet it is also highly context-bound.

Academic writing in English holds a critical position in universities or departments where the language is partly or entirely the medium of instruction. Students' written productions become indispensable to teaching and assessment practices. In other words, it functions as a critical indicator showing students' progress and competence in subject-specific knowledge and general academic skills (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Hyland, 2013). Many students find academic writing formidable in that producing such texts differs considerably from the texts they produce in their pre-tertiary educational lives. For instance, undergraduate students frequently encounter difficulties establishing arguments, generating, organizing, and filtering when necessary, and following the rules of academic registers (Arikan, 2006; Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019). All these mainly stem from the conventions of academic writing, which is "structurally elaborate, complex, abstract and formal," and thus, it requires "more explicit" expressions of logical relations (Hyland, 2002, p. 50). Similarly, as Fitzmaurice and O'Farrell (2010) underline, academic writing is challenging for students because it requires following strict rules and paying attention to logical structures along with eloquence, accuracy, and clarity in expressions. These conventions often impose newer cognitive demands on students, making academic writing "doubly complicated" (Breeze, 2012, p. 9). Accommodation to conventions of academic writing and producing such types of text require knowledge and experience (Grabe, 2001; Hirvela, 2011).

Writing Process and Text Types

Within the framework of academic writing described above, producing such elaborate and complicated texts is not a task completed in one sitting; instead, it is an iterative process in which different variables are at work, and writers undergo different steps. This study describes the writing process in tandem with stages defined by Seow (2002) and the writing model designed by Moore (2003). Seow's (2002) model regards writing as an iterative and continuous process in which students plan, draft, revise, and edit their written productions. Moore's (2003) model aligns with these stages, and it also suggests that writers begin producing texts with both triggers and blockers, and these factors operate as facilitators (e.g., sense of achievement) and prohibitors (e.g., lack of time or confidence) while they engage in efforts to write. Therefore, writers need to utilize environmental (e.g., the existence of collaborative support) and individual moderators (e.g., self-esteem, clarity of personal goals) to achieve effective writing outcomes that culminate with intrinsic (e.g., learning, engagement) and extrinsic (e.g., promotion, recognition) rewards. The absence or lack of facilitators, moderators, and rewards may appear as blockers.

As Schultz (1991) delineates, undergraduate students often practice and learn writing descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative texts, respectively, in

that this way of progress smoothly and easily from the simplest type, the descriptive essay, to the most difficult, the argumentative essay. These four essay types lay the foundations for academic writing in undergraduate education in many countries, including Turkey (Kırkgöz, 2009; Loh, 2018; Thurman, 2007; Toprak & Yücel, 2020). However, other studies also show that opinion essays written in reflective or responsive mode are among the types of academic texts students in Turkish higher education write (Kırkgöz, 2009; Trotman, 2010). Given that English literature is taught by integrating lecture-based learning and in-class discussions at varying degrees depending on the number of students in the Turkish context (Üstündağ Güvenç et al., 2022), writing these types of essays is often an integral part of teaching and assessment in ELL departments, and students encounter such writing tasks as exam questions or assignments for many of the courses they enroll. However, Çelik's (2020) study revealed that process writing is downplayed in the Turkish higher education system, and thus, students have difficulties accommodating themselves to the process writing.

Writer's Block

Writer's block refers to a competent writer's inability or difficulty to produce new written material for a certain period (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2004; Rose, 1984). Such stoppage in the writing process may bring about temporary but significant decreases in the quality and quantity of written works. Therefore, it is often accompanied by stress, a sense of failure, and hopelessness, culminating with abandoning writing, tearing and throwing away the whole text, or permanently calling off the project (Baştuğ et al., 2017). Writers often report that blockage manifests itself while generating, articulating, and expressing ideas and choosing which to follow (Ahmed & Güss, 2022). However, it is a common and undesired problem for professional and student writers that may appear at any stage of the writing process (Moore, 2018).

Despite the consensus on this overall descriptive framework, theoretical and empirical research has suggested a plethora of causes of writer's block. During the 1940s and 1950s, it was generally regarded as a psychological problem, and thus its causes were associated with writers' babyhood and upheavals in their private lives from the Freudian psycho-analytics perspective (Castillo, 2014; Moore, 2018) and, from a psychodynamic perspective, writers' inability to dissociate relationships and events from their own emotional reality (Rose, 1984). In the 1980s and later decades, the pendulum swung to cognitive and affective dimensions of writer's block. Rose (1984) theorized that writer's block is a dysfunction in the production process, and his empirical study delineates that attitudes, the complexity of the writing process, premature editing, and lateness are the primary sources of this impediment. Boice's (1985) study showed that apprehension, procrastination, dysphoria, impatience, perfectionism, anxiety, and rules also lead to writer's block in the higher education context.

Recent studies suggest there are other causes for blocking the writing process. In Michael's (2016) study, feelings of being stuck, discouragement, self-disapproval, and self- and external criticism appeared as blockers. In a more recent study, Ahmed and Güss (2022) showed that writer's block occurs due to affective/physiological, motivational, cognitive, and behavioral factors, and in some cases, a combination of these factors was also observed. Studies focusing on writer's block in higher education also captured a similar portrait in which there are often additional causes to cognitive and affective ones for a while producing an academic text. Zorbaz's (2015) study revealed that socio-economic status and writing in L1 and L2 do not impact writer's block, yet the low frequency of reading and writing along with inadequate writing practices, lead to writer's block in higher education. In addition, Baştuğ et al.'s (2017) phenomenological study also revealed that text types, inappropriate and unclear task instructions, and the limited time allocated to students appeared as reasons for blocks.

Based on the causes, several studies suggest a wide array of ways of coping with writer's block. These ways can be sorted into four main categories: refinement or modifications in the writing process (Jagaiah et al., 2019; Murray & Moore, 2003), a respite from writing (Moore, 2003; Murray & Moore, 2003), controlling negative emotions and thoughts (Huston, 1998; Moore, 2018). Pedagogical practices on writer's block are also heavily centered on using various techniques revolving around these coping strategies. Despite the list of suggested strategies, the literature provides little about what self-administered strategies writers use to overcome writer's block. Ahmed and Güss' (2022) study underpinned that most of these strategies are widely used by writers at varying degrees to cope with writer's block. Their study also indicated other coping strategies, such as focusing on a different writing project, asking for advice, and continuing writing. In another study, Imirie's (2022) findings showed that undergraduate students employ various strategies to overcome blockage, considering their needs, resources, and previous writing experiences.

Empirical Studies on Writer's Block in Academic Writing in English

The pertained literature does not provide much about writer's block in academic writing in English, and the existing studies are primarily centered around causal research and implementing specific strategies to reduce students' writer's block. Lee's (2002) study showed that students' negative past experiences in their L1 and L2 lead to blockage while writing in L2, along with having free reading and writing habits appeared as factors reducing writer's block. In another study, Lee and Krashen (2003) tested the causes of blockage suggested by Rose (1984) in the Chinese higher education context, and findings revealed that blockage primarily resulted from premature editing and failure in developing appropriate strategies to cope with complex writing tasks. Dela Rosa and Genuino's (2018) study on writer's block showed that a great majority of students majoring in English experienced writer's block due mainly to the complexity of academic writing and problems related to the writing process, yet not a meaningful relationship was found between the blockage and writing quality.

This finding suggests that despite having writer's block, students produced high-quality written works. Prihandoko's (2021) study revealed that graduate students had writer's block while writing in English due to a lack of confidence, support, anxiety, fear of criticism, and instructors' demands on high-quality work. Several researchers employed certain teaching or writing techniques to reduce students' writer's block. Adams-Tukiendorf (2008) investigated the impact of four non-standard pre-writing techniques on graduate students' writer's block. Her findings revealed that the effectiveness of these techniques depended on particularities that students had and existed in the context. Bayraktar Balkir (2016) implemented an instruction focusing on problem-solving and creative thinking skills, and findings showed that students' problem-solving and creative thinking skills did not either positively or negatively influence their blockage. Similarly, Salem (2018) used a flipped classroom approach to improve students' functional writing and higher-order thinking skills and reduce occurrences of writer's block. Findings showed that students had less blockage while writing academic texts as teamwork and immediate feedback helped them to modify and refine the writing process and understand the complexity of writing tasks. Despite the valuable insights these studies have revealed, the literature on academic writing in English fails to capture a complete picture of writer's block due mainly to two reasons. First, in these studies, Rose's (1984) scale or its variations were used, which means that these studies are heavily anchored in the assumption that writer's block stems from cognitive variables, excluding other variables that Baştuğ et al. (2017) and Ahmed and Güss (2022) underline. Secondly, these studies do not provide insights into the impact of text types, students' self-administered strategies to overcome writer's block, and their needs to cope with the problem. Therefore, there is a need for studies focusing on writer's block as a whole.

The Present Study

In this study, the term writer's block is conceptualized as a state in which a proficient student has difficulties producing new written materials in L2 in a period of time despite having the desire to do so. Given that there is a paucity of research on writer's block in the higher education context, this study aims to investigate undergraduate students' writer's block in a detailed way and seeks answers to the following research questions;

1. What are the causes of ELL students' writer's block?
2. At what stages of the writing process do they experience writer's block? In what kind of texts do they experience writer's block while writing?
3. What self-administered strategies do they follow to cope with writer's block?
4. What are their needs to cope with writer's block?

Method

Research Design

This study seeks answers to the research questions employing a mixed-methods survey design. This type of research design allows researchers to collect data from large samples through structured and unstructured items (Tan & Siegel, 2018) and still gives participants leeway to voice their thoughts about the phenomenon rather than responding solely to close-ended and structured questions (Ahmed & Güss, 2022; Link, 2008).

Participants

Considering the number of ELL students in Turkish universities, along with participants' consent issues, convenience sampling was deemed the best course of action as this way of sampling enables researchers to include accessible individuals as respondents (Cohen et al., 2018). To reduce the generalizability problem stemming from this sampling method, we randomly selected 17 ELL departments from seven geographical regions of Turkey, and 12 departments from six different regions volunteered to participate in the study. As the theoretical framework suggests that writer's block refers to a competent writer's inability or difficulty producing written material, data were collected from 644 volunteered senior ELL students (413 females and 231 males aged between 22 and 26) from 12 different state universities in Turkey mainly because these students were exposed to all courses specific to writing and produced more essays than other students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through a mixed-method survey designed in accordance with the variables of writer's block the literature indicates. The survey consisted of five sections: (1) demographic information, (2) causes of writer's block, (3) writer's block in the writing process and text types, (4) coping strategies, and (5) students' needs to overcome writer's block. Items in the causes of blocking section were mainly categorized as internal causes and external causes. Internal causes incorporate cognitive reasons (e.g., perfectionism), affective reasons (e.g., stress, anxiety, exhaustion), attitudinal/behavioral reasons (e.g., procrastination), and motivational reasons (e.g., fear of criticism, lack of enjoyment) (Ahmed & Güss, 2022; Moore, 2003). External causes involve spatial/temporal limitations (e.g., writing according to a deadline, not having a suitable place to think and write), heavy workload (e.g., having other obligations), instructions for writing assignments (e.g., unclear instructions), and lack of practice and experience in academic writing (Bastuğ et al., 2017; Moore, 2003). Additionally, expert opinion was taken from two independent scholars regarding relevance, clarity, and coherence. Accordingly, two items were excluded, four were rephrased, and two were added. The causes of blocking section involved 11 items (six for internal causes and five for external causes). The third

section aims to understand better writer's block in the writing process while producing different text types. Based on the literature, five text types (expository, narrative, descriptive, argumentative, responsive-reflective texts) and four stages (planning, drafting, revising, and editing) were included in the survey. These sections involved 5-point-Likert type responses for the frequency of writer's block (i.e., never, rarely, sometimes, often, always), as Rose (1984) suggests. Multiple response items and open-ended questions were used for coping strategies and students' needs. The survey was piloted with small-scale participants, according to which some minor changes (e.g., rephrasing, changing the order of items) were made. The final version of the survey involved 26 items in total. The survey was sent to the participants online, and data collection was administered between December 2022 and January 2023. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was found .87 for the Likert-type items.

As the survey involved different types of items, data were analyzed in two ways. Descriptives (e.g., mean scores, frequencies) and statistical analyses for structured items were carried out through SPSS. As means were also compared using parametric tests, the normal distribution of the data was measured through skewness and kurtosis values, which were between ± 1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Items involving text entry responses were regarded as qualitative data. As qualitative data analysis often entails a nonlinear and iterative process, the analytic process was structured in a phasic fashion rather than in a stepwise fashion (Lester et al., 2020). Therefore, these data were analyzed following six phases of the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Accordingly, the data were read multiple times for familiarization with and immersion in the data. In the second phase, data were systematically examined to generate codes, and all these codes were mapped onto initial themes. The data analysis process was finalized with the contextualization of the data after these themes were reviewed, reorganized, and labeled. Irrelevant and ambiguous responses were not included in the data analysis process. Qualitative data were analyzed by two raters separately using NVivo 12 software to eliminate human fallacy and ensure intercoder reliability.

Findings

Causes of Writer's Block

Findings relating to the causes of writer's block showed that lack of explanatory instructions for writing assignments ($M=3.92$) and lack of experience in producing academic texts ($M=3.63$) were the leading external causes, whereas stress ($M=3.69$) and procrastination ($M=3.57$) emerged as the leading internal causes of writer's block (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Causes of Writer's Block

Items	M	SD
External Causes	3.33	.68
• The lack of clear instructions about the text I write confuses me about how I should write.	3.92	1.08
• My lack of experience in academic writing in English interrupts me while writing.	3.63	1.17
• I cannot focus while writing as I do not have a quiet place.	3.33	1.38
• I get stuck while writing if not enough time is provided.	3.25	1.14
• I feel burned out and cannot write as I must finish many assignments.	2.61	1.28
Internal Causes	3.19	.90
• Stress and anxiety prevent me while writing.	3.69	1.26
• I delay writing until I feel ready.	3.57	1.22
• The fear of getting low grades impedes me while writing.	3.30	1.43
• I do not start the following sentence until I perfect the sentence I wrote.	2.99	1.26
• The thought that I will be criticized for what I write hinders my productivity.	2.97	1.45
• I stop writing if I think I can't write good-quality text.	2.62	1.31

When total mean values for internal and external causes were compared, paired samples t-test results indicated a statistically significant difference between these causes. It can be interpreted that the causes of writer's block mainly stemmed from external factors. Despite the significant difference in t value, the effect size analysis showed that the mean of external causes is only .175 (Cohen's $d=.175<.2$) standard deviations greater than the mean of internal causes, which indicated a small effect size (Cohen et al., 2018).

Table 2.
Paired samples t-test results

	Paired Differences					
	M	SD	Std. Error M	T	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
External Causes						
Internal Causes	.13	.74	.029	4.66	.000*	.17

$p<.01$, Cohen's $d<.2$

Relationship between Writer's Block and Text-types and the Writing Process

Findings about the relationship between causes of writer's block, the writing process, and text types revealed that the participants had mostly blocked while writing argumentative-critical ($M=3.10$) and expository ($M=2.77$) texts. As for the text types, findings indicated that drafting ($M=3.05$) and planning ($M=2.91$) their academic writings were the stages at which the participants were mostly blocked compared to revising ($M=2.04$) and editing ($M=1.93$).

Table 3.
Writer's Block, Text Types, and Writing Process

Text Types	M	SD
<i>I experience writer's block while writing</i>		
Argumentative-critical texts	3.10	1.23
Expository texts	2.77	1.30
Descriptive texts	2.71	1.19
Narrative texts	2.69	1.18
Reflective-responsive texts	2.35	1.35
<i>Writing Process</i>		
<i>I experience writer's block while</i>		
Drafting	3.05	1.17
Planning	2.91	1.24
Revising	2.04	1.04
Editing	1.93	1.07

The correlation analysis was carried out to understand the relationship between text types and writer's block and the writing process and writer's block. Table 4 shows a statistically significant positive correlation between each type of cause of writer's block and text types at the 0.01 level ($p=.000<0.01$). When Pearson correlation coefficient values were compared, a weak correlation was found between external causes and reflective-responsive ($r=.28<.350$), descriptive ($r=.27<.35$), and narrative ($r=.32<.35$) texts, whereas a moderate correlation was found between external causes and expository ($r=.37>.35$) and argumentative-critical ($r=.37>.35$) texts. In the same vein, a weak correlation was found between internal causes and expository ($r=.32>.35$), reflective-responsive ($r=.28>.35$), argumentative-critical ($r=.30>.35$), descriptive ($r=.20>.35$), narrative ($r=.24>.35$) texts.

Table 4.
Correlations between Causes of Writer's Block and Text Types

		Expository	Reflective-responsive	Argumentative	Descriptive	Narrative
External		.37**	.28**	.37**	.27**	.32**
Causes	Pearson Corr.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Internal		.32**	.28**	.30**	.20**	.24**
Causes	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlation analysis of causes of writer's block and the writing process revealed a similar picture. Table 5 shows a statistically significant positive correlation between each type of cause of writer's block and each step of the writing process at the 0.01 level ($p=.000<0.01$). However, Pearson correlation coefficient values indicated that external causes weakly correlated with planning ($r=.32<.35$), revising ($r=.26<.35$), and editing ($r=.22<.350$), and only the drafting step moderately correlated with the external causes ($r=.37<.35$). As for internal causes, a weak correlation was found for planning ($r=.29>.35$), drafting ($r=.30>.35$), revising ($r=.23>.35$), and editing ($r=.20>.35$).

Table 5.
Correlations between Causes of Writer's Block and the Writing Process

		Planning	Drafting	Revising	Editing
External Causes	Pearson Corr.	.32**	.37**	.26**	.22**
Internal Causes	Sig. (2-tailed)	.29**	.30**	.23**	.20**
		.000	.000	.000	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Coping Strategies for Writer's Block

The participants were given six pre-determined strategies adapted from the pertained literature and asked to choose three strategies they frequently used to overcome writer's block. In addition, they were also allowed to add their own strategies to gain more insights into overcoming writer's block. Both pre-determined, and participants' own strategies for overcoming writer's block were thematically grouped as continue-to-write and avoid-writing. The first group involves strategies showing that participants are still in the writing process, whereas the second group includes strategies that participants stop writing and engage in other activities rather than writing.

Table 6.
Coping Strategies

Coping Strategies (emerged from the multi-response items)		
Continue-to-write Strategies	f	%
Take advice or feedback from a friend/teacher	367	56.9
Start working on the next section for the same assignment	237	36.8
Work on another written assignment	133	20.7
Avoid-writing Strategies		
Eat something/have a drink	285	44.3
Watching movies etc. / listening to music	213	33.1
Take a walk	155	24.1
<i>Each participant responded to these items separately.</i>		
Coping Strategies (emerged from the open-ended item)		
Continue-to-write Strategies	f	%
Read about/research the given topic	94	33.8
Striving to write anyway	42	15.1
Free writing either in English or Turkish	29	10.4
Focus on previously written statements	11	3.9
Avoid-writing Strategies		
Giving short breaks to clear my head	45	16.2
Stop writing	36	12.9
Meditation/exercise (physical)	21	7.6
<i>Of 644 participants, 212 of them added other strategies they used. The total frequency of responses is 278</i>		
Distribution of Coping Strategies		
Using both strategies in different combinations	481	74.7
Using only continue-to-write strategies	120	18.6
Using only avoid-writing strategies	43	6.7

As shown in Table 6, the leading coping strategies were taking advice from a friend or teacher (f= 367, 56.9%) and eating or drinking something while writing

($f=285$, 44.3%), respectively, whereas working on another assignment ($f=133$, 20.7%) and taking a walk ($f=155$, 24.1%) emerged as the least preferred strategies. Different combinations emerged as the participants chose at least one and at most three strategies that they effectively used to cope with writer's block. Additionally, an open-ended question was also addressed to the participants to widen the range of coping strategies they used. Their responses were also thematically coded as either continue-to-write or avoid-writing. These findings also indicated other strategies. Accordingly, reading about or researching the given topic ($f=94$, 33.8%), giving a short break for thinking clearly about what and how to write ($f=45$, 16.2%), and striving to write anyway ($f=42$, 15.1%) emerged as the leading strategies from the responses. The distribution of coping strategies showed that most participants used both continue-to-write and avoid-writing strategies in different combinations ($f=481$, 74.7%), whereas 18.6 of them used only continue-to-write strategies and only 6.7% of them used only avoid-writing strategies.

Needs to Overcome Writer's Block

Table 7 shows the participants' needs related to the writing process, academic texts, and written assignments to overcome writer's block. Accordingly, extending knowledge of and doing more practice for better drafting ($n=275$, 42.7%) and planning ($n=274$, 42.5%) academic texts appeared as the leading needs with a slight difference, whereas revising ($n=52$, 8.1%) and editing ($n=43$, 6.7%) their writings were the steps that the participants least needed to improve. These findings are also critical because they underpin the findings showing that they were mostly blocked while planning and drafting while writing an academic text. Secondly, the responses indicated that the participants also needed improvement in using academic language appropriately ($n=181$, 28.1%), writing coherent sentences and paragraphs ($n=136$, 21.1%), linking those sentences smoothly ($n=134$, 20.8%), and writing clear and to-the-point thesis statements or main ideas ($n=124$, 19.3%) for their academic writings. Lastly, the most underlined needs related to written assignments were straightforward and to-the-point instructions for assignments ($n=168$, 26.1%), studying sample assignments ($n=158$, 24.5%), and feedback before submitting assignments ($n=154$, 23.9%).

Table 7.
Participants' Needs to Overcome Writer's Block

Needs	f	%
Needs related to the writing process		
• Drafting	275	42.7
• Planning	274	42.5
• Revising	52	8.1
• Editing	43	6.7
Needs related to academic texts		
• Using academic language appropriately	181	28.1
• Writing coherent sentences and paragraphs	136	21.1
• Linking sentences smoothly	134	20.8
• Writing clear and to-the-point thesis statements	124	19.3
• Paraphrasing and summarizing other academic sources	69	10.7
Needs related to written assignments		
• Straightforward and to-the-point instructions for assignments	168	26.1
• Studying sample assignments	158	24.5
• Feedback before submitting assignments	154	23.9
• Adequate time for completing written assignments	112	17.4
• Others (e.g., exam questions requiring short essays, more courses on academic writing etc.)	52	8.1

Discussion

In attempting to explore writer's block in the tertiary education context, this study draws from 644 ELL students' self-reports on producing academic texts in English. Regarding the first research question, findings revealed that stress, procrastination, and fear of failure were the internal causes of writer's block, whereas the lack of clear instructions for assignments and experience in writing appeared as the leading external causes. Although the mean difference between these two types of causes is statistically significant, the effect size value indicated a small impact. Considering these findings, it can be deduced that ELL students frequently experience writer's block due to the different combinations of external and internal causes. These findings partly concur with those revealed in other studies on writer's block (e.g., Ahmed & Güss, 2022; Baştuğ et al., 2017; Michael, 2016), but more importantly, they also broaden the range of causes for writer's block and provide empirical results about the impact of these causes. Accordingly, writer's block cannot be limited to cognitive, psychological, or affective factors. Additionally, these results also underpin Moore's (2003) model of academic writing, which argues that triggers and blockers are at work from the beginning of the writing process.

Regarding the relationship between writer's block, text types, and the writing process, findings revealed that the participants mostly suffered from writer's block while writing argumentative-critical texts, followed by expository, descriptive, and narrative texts with slight differences, respectively. Although this finding alone is in line with those revealed by Baştuğ et al. (2013), statistical analysis indicated a moderate correlation between the external causes of writer's block and expository and argumentative-critical texts and a weak correlation between both external and internal

causes and the other academic text types. Therefore, it can be argued that ELL students experience writer's block due to external causes while producing argumentative-critical and expository texts compared to the other types. As for the writing process, drafting and planning emerged as the stages at which the participants were mostly blocked. However, the data analysis indicated only a moderate correlation between the external causes and drafting and showed weak correlations between the other variables. The impact of external causes on argumentative-critical and expository texts and the drafting stage of the writing process can be explained through their nature.

As Schultz (1991) argues, argumentative-critical texts are often the outcome of a complex process requiring "examining a problem, evaluating evidence, generating and testing hypotheses, and redefining them in accordance with new ideas and evidence" (p. 412). Besides, these ideas are often organized and linked to one another in unique ways depending on the phenomenon in question. By contrast, expository texts are often produced in an informative mode (e.g., compare-and-contrast, cause-and-effect, etc.) in which students first generate ideas depending on their content knowledge and, more importantly, on the conceptual materials they acquire after reading and researching the given topic. Secondly, students linearly intertwine these ideas compared to argumentative-critical texts (Schultz, 1991). In addition, drafting is the stage at which students outline the overall framework of their writings depending on the sufficient ideas gathered and generated in the planning stage (Seow, 2002). Therefore, it is likely to suffer from writer's block without clear instructions, the experience of writing such texts, adequate time, and a suitable place to ponder and write. In the same vein, recent studies also revealed that ELL students found drafting and outlining academic texts complex and confusing (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Ceylan, 2019). Besides, Ahmed and Güss (2022) also showed that even professional and semi-professional writers struggled with articulating and expressing ideas while writing. Considering all these, writer's block, at least to some extent, appears as an inherent part of the written production process.

As for coping with writer's block, findings showed that 74.7% of the participants used both continue-to-write and avoid-writing strategies in different combinations. Their responses to the structured items revealed that 56.9% of them used taking advice or feedback from a friend or teacher, and 44.3% of them used eating/drinking something as strategies to cope with writer's block. Given that coping with writer's block entails addressing the underlying causes (Smeets, 2008), taking advice or feedback from others appears as the most effective solution as it may address several causes of writer's block (Ahmed & Güss, 2022). This explains why more than half of the participants used this strategy. Additionally, responses to the open-ended question indicated reading, researching, and striving to write as the most frequently used continue-to-write strategy, whereas giving short breaks emerged as the most frequently followed avoid-writing strategy. These findings are dissimilar to the use of strategies that Ahmed and Güss (2022) revealed due mainly to the occupational

differences between the samples. Therefore, it can be inferred that the reason why individuals write influences both causes of writer's block and the way people cope with it. In Ahmed and Güss' (2022) study, the sample involved professional and semi-professional writers, and these participants mainly were blocked due to physiological causes, such as stress, intense emotions, and mental or physical illness. Accordingly, those participants used different strategies to overcome writer's block.

The participants' needs related to the writing process predominantly clustered around the drafting and planning stages. This finding underpins and concurs with the other findings showing that the participants were mostly blocked while drafting and planning. The participants' needs in the other two groups showed a more balanced distribution and underlined that they needed to develop their competences in using academic language appropriately, coherence, smooth transition between sentences and paragraphs, and producing well-written thesis statements for writing academic texts. These findings are in line with those revealed in other recent studies (Cai, 2017; Fatimah, 2018). For instance, studies from the Chinese and Indonesian contexts showed that students majoring in English needed to improve themselves in writing argumentative and critical texts, properly using academic language understanding the specific language features of the academic genre (Cai, 2017; Fatimah, 2018).

Additionally, responses also revealed the need for clear instructions for assignments, studying sample assignments, feedback, and adequate time for their assignments. These needs enunciate problems with the content, delivery, and quality of courses related to academic writing. Almacioğlu and Okan's (2018) case study revealed that genre-based writing instruction allowed ELL students to study various sample texts with clear rules and instructions for their essays. They led to increases in their writing performance along with their analysis of literary and academic texts. Cheong et al.'s (2023) study emphasized the significance of taking feedback, as findings showed that students were prone to prioritize and rely on peer feedback while producing academic texts.

Based on the overall picture that the participants' needs portrayed, writer's block in the Turkish university context appears as a layer where critical problems with pre-university and university education come to the surface. As Altınmakas and Bayyurt (2019) argue, writing in their native language and L2 are often left behind during pre-university education, and students do not acquire the habit of reading during this process. In higher education, these problems are exacerbated when students meet with the rule-bound and complicated nature of academic writing, although they are well aware of the importance of writing and attach the highest importance to this skill. Therefore, a sharp divergence occurs between their needs and the course requirements. However, as Feng et al. (2019) caveat, in such a case, decision-makers and instructors should take action to change students' perceptions of what they need to learn rather than tailoring the curriculum or courses according to solely their self-perceived needs. Similarly, Üstündağ Güvenç et al.'s (2022) study showed that re-

shaping the course content and delivery, merging students' self-perceived needs and curricular requirements yielded positive results in ELL students' academic gains and writing. Additionally, Dolgunsöz et al.'s (2018) study also revealed that integrating new technologies, such as virtual reality or AI-based tools, into writing courses helped university students improve their writing performances.

Conclusion

This study reported 644 ELL students' self-reports on writer's block in the higher education context. Findings showed that both internal and external causes were at work, yet external causes were moderately more influential, while students produced argumentative-critical and expository texts and were influential in the drafting stage of the writing process. Findings also revealed that students pursued continue-to-write and avoid-writing strategies in different combinations to cope with writer's block and needed to expand their knowledge and experience in drafting, planning, using academic language, coherence, and smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Lastly, findings highlighted the need for clear instructions, studying sample texts, and feedback from teachers to overcome writer's block. Accordingly, writer's block in academic writing is neither a unique phenomenon nor a mental dysfunction; instead, it is a natural outcome of the academic writing process in which students organize and reorganize their ideas and others' ideas gathered from sources they read using their intellectual capitals, content knowledge and proficiency in English. Despite the data gathered from 644 ELL students, findings should be cautiously approached as academic writing depends on various contextual variables. However, the detailed picture of the causes of writer's block, the relationship between writer's block, text types, and the stages of the writing process, along with students' strategies and needs, may guide teachers and other practitioners working in the higher education context to re-shape their course contents and teaching to reduce the frequency and impact of writer's block.

In line with the findings, this study suggests four critical implications. First, students' knowledge and awareness of writer's block should be increased, and this phenomenon should be included in academic writing courses. In doing this, AI technologies on writing can also be used and integrated into classroom practices. Secondly, the number of writing practices within and out of the classroom should be increased, and the text types that students write should be varied so that writing becomes a part of the ordinary course of their lives. Third, teachers should provide students with feedback before submitting their assignments and after grading them. At this juncture, it should be underlined that most teachers are well aware of the significance of feedback, yet crowded classrooms, especially in the Turkish higher education context, impede teachers from doing so; thus, giving feedback to hundreds of students is easier said than done. In such a case, explaining expectations and rules to students and studying sample assignments or texts, allocating sufficient class time may yield less writer's block and allow teachers to focus on the most critical parts of

assignments. Integrating self, peer, and teacher feedback at varying degrees may also help reduce writer's block and teachers' workloads. In doing this, various online tools and AI technologies can also be manipulated, and students may self-assess their own written productions using these online tools. Lastly, there is still a great need for research investigating writer's block in the higher education context. Therefore, future studies may focus on classifying the causes of writer's block according to the stages of the writing process for each text type, collecting self-reports, observational data, and students' written productions.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This study was carried out with the approval and under the scrutiny of the Human Research Ethics Committee of Akdeniz University (05.12.2022-522529) and complied with the rules of research ethics imposed by the Council of Higher Education. The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Geniřletilmiř Özet

Yükseköğretimde öğretim dilinin İngilizce olduđu pek çok lisans ya da lisansüstü program bulunmaktadır. Özellikle lisans eğitiminde, öğrencilerden fikirlerini, düşüncelerini ya da duygularını bir kâğıda kendi sözcükleriyle İngilizce olarak yazmaları istendiğinde, bir iki hafta içinde bir kompozisyon yazmaları istendiğinde ya da bir sınav için kısa bir kompozisyon yazacaklarını öğrendiklerinde, öğretim elemanları genellikle mutsuz yüzler, serzenişler, hoşnutsuz bakışlar ve iç çekişler içeren sahnelerle karşılaşır. İlk bakışta, öğrencilerin bu tepkileri ilgisizlik veya az çabayla çok şey kazanma arzusuyla ilişkilendirilebilir. Ancak böyle bir çağrışım kolayca kaçmak olarak da düşünülebilir çünkü mekân, zaman ve kişiler değışse de bu tepkiler pek çok yerde benzer şekilde ortaya çıkabilmektedir. Bu durum öğrencilerin ikinci dilde yazma performansının çeşitli yazma sorunlarıyla engellendiğı bağlamlarda daha yaygındır (Dela Rosa & Genuino 2018). Türkiye'deki ve diğere ülkelerdeki İngiliz edebiyatı bölümleri (İDE) söz konusu olduğunda, ikinci dilde yazmak ağır bir yük haline gelebilir çünkü bu öğrenciler için İngilizce yazmak artık pekiştirilecek bir dil becerisi olmaktan çıkmış (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019, s. 89), bunun ötesinde yazılı üretimler bir değerlendirme ve notlandırma aracı haline dönüşerek eğitim-öğretimin vazgeçilmez bir parçası olmuştur. Akademik yazmanın ABD'deki lisansüstü öğrenciler için bile bir engel olarak görüldüğü düşünülürse, birçok İDE lisans öğrencisi, ödevlerini geç teslim etme, yarım bırakma veya hiç yapmama gibi akademik yazmaya yönelik olumsuz eğilimler gösterebilmektedir (Fernsten & Reda, 2011; Huerta vd., 2017). Bu eğilimlerin pek çok nedeni olabileceğı gibi, bu durum yazar tutukluğuyla da ilişkilendirilebilir. Öğrencilerin yazma performanslarını ve kalitesini etkileyen bir olgu olan yazma tutukluğu nispeten az çalışılmaktadır. Bu açıdan, bu çalışmanın amacı akademik yazmaya oldukça önem verilen İDE bölümlerinde, yazar tutukluğu olgusunu incelemektedir.

Akademik amaçlı İngilizce kavramı daha çok yüksek öğretimde İngilizcenin öğretim dili olarak kullanıldığı bağlamlara yönelik bir dil öğretimi ve gelişimini hedeflemekle ve genellikle İngilizce olarak akademik yazma becerisiyle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Üniversitelerin özerkliği, akademik alanların farklılıkları, öznellikler gibi değışkenler göz önüne alındığında hem akademik amaçlı İngilizce hem de İngilizce akademik yazım oldukça bağlamsal kavramlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ancak, İngilizcenin akademik doğrultuda kullanıldığı bağlamların hemen hepsinde öğrencilerin yazılı üretimleri eğitim-öğretim ve ölçme-değerlendirme faaliyetlerinin temelinde oldukça önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Bu açıdan ele alındığında, akademik yazım öğrencilerin bir oturuşta yazdığı metinlerden ziyade farklı adımlardan oluşan, devamlı ve tekrarlayan bir süreç olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın kapsamında akademik yazım süreci Seow'un (2002) ve Moore'un (2003) modelleri temel alınarak çerçevelenmiştir. Akademik yazımı karmaşıklaştıran bir diğere unsur da metin türleridir. Lisans öğrencileri genellikle tanımlayıcı, öyküleyici, açıklayıcı ve tartışmacı metinler yazmayı öğrenirler çünkü bu dört tür, Türkiye dahil birçok ülkede lisans eğitiminde akademik yazımın temelinde yer

almaktadır. Bunlarla birlikte, bazı çalışmalar yansıtıcı veya yanıtlayıcı modda yazılan fikir yazılarının, Türk üniversitelerinde öğrencilerinin yazdığı akademik metin türleri arasında olduğunu göstermektedir (Kırkgöz, 2009; Trotman, 2010).

Bu açıdan, lisans döneminde akademik yazmayla tanışan öğrencilerin farklı derecelerde yazar tutukluğu sorunuyla karşılaşmaları oldukça muhtemeldir. Yazar tutukluluğu yetkin bir yazarın belirli bir süre içinde yeni yazılı materyal üretememesi veya bu konuda zorluk çekmesi olarak tanımlanabilir (Boice, 1985; Flaherty, 2004; Rose, 1984). Alanyazında bu genel betimleyici çerçeve üzerinde fikir birliğine varılmasına rağmen, araştırmalar, yazar tutukluğunun bilişsel, duyuşsal, davranışsal, güdüsel gibi çok sayıda nedenini öne sürmüştür. Ancak yazar tutukluğuyla başa çıkma yolları, bunun için öğrencilerin ihtiyaçları ve yazma sürecinin hangi adımlarında hangi metin tiplerinde bu durumun ortaya çıktığıyla ilgili çalışmaların sayısı oldukça azdır. Yükseköğretim bağlamında yazar tutukluğuna ilişkin araştırmaların azlığı göz önüne alındığında, bu çalışma lisans öğrencilerinin yazma tutukluğunu ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelemeyi amaçlamakta ve aşağıdaki araştırma sorularına cevap aramaktadır;

1. İDE öğrencilerinin yazar tutukluğunun sebepleri nelerdir?
2. Yazma sürecinin hangi aşamalarında yazar tutukluğu yaşıyorlar? Ne tür metinlerde yazarken tıkanma yaşıyorlar?
3. Yazar tutukluğuyla başa çıkmak için hangi kendi kendine uygulanan stratejileri izliyorlar?
4. Yazma tutukluğuyla başa çıkmak için ihtiyaçları nelerdir?

Karma yöntemli anket deseniyle araştırma sorularına cevap aranmıştır. Bu araştırma deseni, araştırmacıların yapılandırılmış ve yapılandırılmamış maddeler yoluyla büyük örneklemelerden veri toplamasına olanak tanımakta (Tan & Siegel, 2018) ve katılımcılara konu hakkındaki düşüncelerini detaylı olarak dile getirmeleri için imkân sağlamaktadır. (Ahmed & Güss, 2022; Link, 2008). Türkiye'deki üniversitelerindeki İDE öğrencilerinin sayısı göz önüne alındığında, uygun örneklem yönteminin veri toplama süreci açısından en uygun yöntem olduğu düşünülmüştür çünkü bu örneklem yöntemi araştırmacıların erişilebilir bireyleri katılımcı olarak dahil etmesine olanak tanımaktadır (Cohen et al., 2018). Türkiye'deki farklı üniversitelerin İDE bölümlerinde okumakta olan 644 gönüllü son sınıf öğrencisinden veri toplanmıştır.

İlk araştırma sorusuyla ilgili bulgular stres, erteleme ve başarısızlık korkusunun yazma tutukluğunun önde gelen iç nedenleri olduğunu, ödevler için net talimatların olmaması ve yazma deneyimindeki eksikliğin ise önde gelen dış nedenler olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu iki neden türü arasındaki ortalama fark istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olmakla birlikte, etki büyüklüğü değeri küçüktür. Bu bulgular göz önüne alındığında, İDE öğrencilerinin dış ve iç nedenlerin farklı kombinasyonlarından dolayı sık sık yazma tutukluğu yaşadıkları sonucuna varılabilir. Yazar tutukluğu,

metin türleri ve yazma süreci arasındaki ilişkiye ilişkin bulgular ise, katılımcıların en çok tartışmacı metinler yazarken yazma tutukluğu yaşadıklarını, bunu sırasıyla açıklayıcı, betimleyici ve öyküleyici metinlerde küçük farklılıklarla izlediklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular ayrıca yazma tutukluğunun dış nedenlerle açıklayıcı ve tartışmacı metinler arasında orta düzeyde bir ilişki olduğunu ve hem dış hem de iç nedenlerle diğer akademik metin türleri arasında zayıf bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Yazma süreciyle ilgili olarak ise, bulgular taslak oluşturma ve planlama başmaklarının katılımcıların en fazla tıkanıdığı aşamalar olduğunu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bununla birlikte, veri analizi, dış nedenlerle taslak oluşturma arasında yalnızca orta düzeyde bir ilişki gösterirken gösterdi ve diğer değişkenler arasında zayıf düzeyde bir ilişki ortaya koymuştur. Üçüncü araştırma sorusuna ilişkin olarak bulgular, yazar tutukluğuyla başa çıkma konusunda katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğunun hem yazmaya devam etme hem de yazmadan kaçınma stratejilerini farklı kombinasyonlarda kullandığını göstermiştir. Son soruyla ilgili olarak ise, bulgular öğrencilerin yazar tutukluğuyla başa çıkma konusunda yazma sürecine ilişkin bilgi ve deneyimlerinin arttırmaya, akademik dili uygun kullanma, tutarlılık, cümleler ve paragraflar arasında yumuşak geçiş ve akademik metin yazmak için iyi yazılmış tez cümleleri üretme yeterliliklerini geliştirmeleri gerektiğinin göstermektedir. Ek olarak, öğrencilerin yazılı ödevleri için net talimatlara, örnek ödevleri incelemeye, geri bildirim almaya ve yeterli zamana ihtiyaç duyduklarını belirtmektedir.