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Academic Writing Challenges Among English Majors at Kabul University: Anxiety, Idea Organization, and Feedback

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Abstract: Academic writing is a core requirement for undergraduate English majors, yet little empirical work has examined the difficulties these students experience in Afghanistan. This study aimed to examine writing anxiety, organization of ideas and paragraph coherence, and perceptions of feedback among undergraduate English majors at Kabul University, and to identify the instructional solutions that students support. A quantitative descriptive survey design was used. Seventy-two students from Years 1 to 4 of the English Department completed a 21-item, five-point Likert-type questionnaire distributed through Google Forms, and the responses were analyzed with descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and comparisons across year of study. Writing anxiety (M = 2.93, SD = 0.86), organization difficulties (M = 2.94, SD = 0.66), and feedback-related difficulties (M = 2.87, SD = 0.77) were all moderate. Time pressure was the strongest anxiety trigger, concern about grammar the weakest, logical organization of ideas the most strongly endorsed organizational difficulty, and limited peer-review opportunities the highest-rated feedback problem. Students strongly supported all proposed solutions (M = 3.79, SD = 0.98), particularly sentence-combining activities, model texts, and specific written suggestions for reorganization. The three challenge areas were moderately and positively intercorrelated (r = .39 to .42). The findings suggest that performance conditions and the design of writing instruction, rather than linguistic accuracy alone, shape students' difficulties, with implications for course design, feedback practice, and teacher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is the main means through which university students demonstrate what they know, build arguments, and report their work, and it requires writers to manage audience, purpose, and disciplinary conventions at the same time (Swales & Feak, 2012). For students majoring in English, the demand is double: English is not only their field of study but also a medium of academic communication. Research in other EFL settings shows that this

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combination is demanding even for advanced learners, because academic writing calls for strategic, rhetorical, and linguistic knowledge rather than grammatical accuracy alone (Esfandiari et al., 2022). Evidence from Afghan universities, although limited, points in the same direction. In a survey of 121 English majors at Kabul University, Noori (2020) found that students struggled with the content, structure, and language of their academic writing, and studies of Afghan EFL learners have linked writing anxiety to teacher evaluation, examinations, assignments, and limited time (Hasanzoy et al., 2019; Miri & Joia, 2018; Quvanch & Kew, 2022). Taken together, these studies suggest that the difficulties of Afghan English majors extend beyond grammar and vocabulary to the affective and organizational demands of the writing process.

The setting of the present study makes these issues especially pertinent. Academic Writing is a core subject that English majors at Kabul University take during their four years of study, and writing is the main way in which they are assessed in other courses (Noori, 2020). Students are therefore expected to move from sentence-level accuracy to the extended, well-organized texts that their instructors and future employers require, often with limited reading materials and few opportunities for individual consultation. Because writing instruction is shared across several courses and instructors, information about how students themselves experience it is a practical starting point for any coordinated improvement. Student perceptions do not replace measures of writing performance, but they show where learners feel pressured, confused, or unsupported, and these are the points at which instruction is most likely to succeed or fail.

Writing anxiety is the most thoroughly studied of these demands. Cheng (2004) distinguished cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and avoidance behavior as its components, and later reviews describe it as a state of apprehension that interferes with both the writing process and the development of writing skill (Nor & Senom, 2024). Studies in resource-limited and instructional settings indicate that anxiety is shaped by the conditions under which students write, including evaluation, deadlines, and the kind of support available, and not only by learners' proficiency (Kurniasih et al., 2024; Mudra, 2023). Du and Zhang (2026) add that immediate, non-judgmental feedback and repeated opportunities to revise were associated with lower anxiety among university EFL writers. Qualitative accounts from Afghan EFL students also describe anxiety as an experience that builds around specific writing occasions rather than as a general trait (Miri & Joia, 2018). Across these studies, the common thread is that anxiety responds to features of instruction that teachers can change, which makes it important to identify which features trouble students most in a particular context.

A second demand is the organization of ideas and paragraph coherence, which involves selecting relevant ideas, sequencing them logically, and signaling their relationships through thesis statements, supporting details, transitions, and framing paragraphs (Swales & Feak, 2012). In the Kabul University context, structure has been identified as a major area of difficulty (Noori, 2020), but the components of organization have not been separated, so it remains unclear whether students struggle more with local devices, such as transitions and

thesis statements, or with the logical sequence of a whole essay. This distinction matters for teaching because the two call for different instructional responses.

The third demand is feedback. Feedback improves writing only when learners understand it and act on it, which Carless and Boud (2018) describe as feedback literacy. Its effects also vary with learners' proficiency and with how it is delivered (Budianto et al., 2020). Peer feedback can match teacher feedback in improving writing competence and self-efficacy and can strengthen students' autonomous motivation, provided that students are trained to give it (Cui et al., 2021). Specificity, structure, training, and opportunities for revision therefore appear to be the conditions that determine whether feedback helps. Whether Kabul University students experience these conditions in their writing courses has not been examined.

Previous work in the Afghan context has addressed writing difficulties (Noori, 2020) and writing or research anxiety (Miri & Joia, 2018; Quvanch & Kew, 2022; Ziar et al., 2025) separately. To our knowledge, few studies have examined anxiety, organization of ideas, and feedback together in the same group of English majors, and none has asked these students which instructional changes they would support. Without this evidence, instructors and curriculum designers cannot judge how large each difficulty is relative to the others, how the difficulties are related, or where intervention is likely to be accepted by students. The relationship among the three areas is also of theoretical interest: if anxiety, organizational difficulty, and dissatisfaction with feedback tend to occur together, they are better addressed through a coordinated change in instruction than through separate remedies for each.

This study therefore aims to profile the writing anxiety, organizational difficulties, and feedback experiences of undergraduate English majors at Kabul University and to identify the solutions they support. Its specific contribution is threefold. It offers an item-level profile of three challenge areas for the same respondents, which allows their relative size and interrelation to be compared. It maps students' endorsement of concrete solutions onto each challenge area. It also provides a baseline for the department's decisions about writing instruction. The research questions were designed to be feasible within a single department and a short survey, relevant to local teaching practice, novel in combining the three areas, and ethical in relying on voluntary, anonymous participation. The study addresses five questions. First, what level of writing anxiety do undergraduate English majors at Kabul University report, and which sources of anxiety are most strongly endorsed? Second, how do these students rate their difficulties in organizing ideas and maintaining paragraph coherence, and which aspects are most difficult? Third, how do they evaluate the feedback they receive and the opportunities they have to use it? Fourth, which instructional solutions do they support? Fifth, how are the challenge areas and support for solutions related to one another, and do they differ by year of study?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire was used to collect self-reported data from undergraduate English Language and Literature majors in the English Department of Kabul University. The design was chosen because the research questions ask how common and how strongly endorsed particular difficulties and solutions are, and how these ratings relate to each other, which a standardized survey can answer for a whole department in a single administration. A descriptive survey is appropriate when the aim is to measure the extent of attitudes, experiences, and perceptions in a defined population, and a cross-sectional questionnaire allows relationships among variables to be examined without manipulating them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants and Sampling

The target population was 278 undergraduate English majors enrolled in the department. The sample size was calculated with Cochran's (1977) formula for a 95% confidence level and a 10% margin of error (p = .50), which gives $n_o = (1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5) / 0.10^2 \approx 96$. With the finite-population correction for N = 278, the required sample was $n = 96 / (1 + 95/278) \approx 72$. Seventy-two students therefore participated. Stratified random sampling by year of study was used so that each year group was represented (Cochran, 1977), because stratification reduces sampling error when the subgroups of a population may differ on the characteristics being measured and allows the sample to mirror the structure of the program. ⟦Authors to confirm: how the stratified random sample was drawn from a Google Forms distribution, and whether participation was voluntary and self-selected.⟧ Eligible participants were undergraduate students currently enrolled in any of the four years of the program. The participants were all male and mostly aged 20 to 22 years, and 58.3% were second-year students; their full profile is reported in the Findings section.

Instrument

Data were collected with a self-administered questionnaire of three parts. The first part contained demographic items (gender, age, year of study, and years of formal English study). The second part contained 15 statements measuring three challenge areas: writing anxiety (5 items, A1 to A5), organization of ideas (5 items, B1 to B5), and feedback and instruction (5 items, C1 to C5). The third part contained six statements (D1 to D6) asking students to evaluate proposed instructional solutions. All 21 substantive items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (Likert, 1932), from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For the challenge items, higher scores indicate greater agreement that the difficulty exists; for the solution items, higher scores indicate stronger support. ⟦Authors to confirm the source of the questionnaire: it is described here as developed by the research team, with item content informed by the writing-anxiety constructs of Cheng (2004), the structure and content difficulties reported by Noori (2020), and the feedback-literacy and peer-feedback literature reviewed above (Carless & Boud, 2018; Cui et al., 2021). Please state if any items were

adapted from a published instrument and cite it. Authors to complete: how content validity was established (expert review, pilot test), and Cronbach's alpha for each of the four constructs from the SPSS output.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity concerns whether the items represent the constructs they are meant to measure, and internal consistency concerns whether the items within a construct vary together. Because each construct was measured by five or six items, reliability was to be evaluated separately for each construct rather than for the whole questionnaire. ⟦Authors to report the validity procedures and the four Cronbach's alpha coefficients here; none are given in the original manuscript, and the reviewers' request for more information on the questionnaire cannot be fully met without them.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms to students of the English Department of Kabul University ⟦dates of data collection. The opening page explained the purpose of the study, stated that participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that responses would be used for academic research only. Submitting the form was taken as consent, no names or identifying information were collected, and respondents could leave the form at any time. ⟦Authors to confirm these ethical procedures and to state the ethical approval or departmental permission obtained.

Data Analysis

Responses were coded numerically and analyzed in SPSS version. Frequencies and percentages described the sample, and means and standard deviations were computed for each item and for each of the four constructs (writing anxiety, organization of ideas, feedback, and solutions) by averaging the items belonging to the construct. Means were interpreted with the following bands: 1.00 to 1.80 (strongly disagree), 1.81 to 2.60 (disagree), 2.61 to 3.40 (moderate or neutral), 3.41 to 4.20 (agree), and 4.21 to 5.00 (strongly agree). Ninety-five percent confidence intervals were calculated for construct means with the t distribution (df = 71). Pearson correlations were computed among the four construct scores, and construct means were compared descriptively across year-of-study groups.

FINDINGS

Participant Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 72 respondents. All respondents were male. Most (72.2%) were aged 20 to 22 years, 16.7% were aged 23 to 25 years, and 11.1% were aged 17 to 19 years. By year of study, 58.3% were respondents in their second year of study, 16.7% in the third year, 13.9% in the fourth year, and 11.1% in the first year.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 72)*

Characteristic	Category	*f*	%
Gender	Male	72	100.0
Age (years)	17–19	8	11.1
	20–22	52	72.2
	23–25	12	16.7
Year of study	First year	8	11.1
	Second year	42	58.3
	Third year	12	16.7
	Fourth year	10	13.9
Total		72	100.0

Note. f = frequency.

Overview of Item-Level Results

Of the 15 items measuring challenges, one (A3) fell in the agree band, three (A5, B4, and C5) fell in the disagree band, and the remaining 11 fell in the moderate band (*M* = 2.72 to 3.38). All six solution items fell in the agree band (*M* = 3.54 to 4.10). Item standard deviations ranged from 0.97 to 1.24 for the challenge items and from 1.00 to 1.29 for the solution items, which indicates considerable variation in individual responses even where means were similar. The following subsections report the results for each research question in turn.

Writing Anxiety

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the five anxiety items. The construct mean was 2.93 (*SD* = 0.86), which falls in the moderate band (95% CI [2.73, 3.13]), and item means varied from 2.40 to 3.52. Item A3, concerning time limits, had the highest mean among the anxiety items (*M* = 3.52, *SD* = 1.22), and 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it. The second-highest was A2, concerning pressure to be perfect in a first draft (*M* = 3.00, *SD* = 1.23). The lowest-rated item was A5, concerning the worry that one's grammar is too poor to be understood (*M* = 2.40, *SD* = 1.16).

Table 2. *Writing Anxiety Items*

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
A1. I worry my writing will be judged negatively by teachers.	2.87	1.09	Moderate
A2. I feel high pressure to be perfect in my first draft.	3.00	1.23	Moderate
A3. Time limits on writing tasks make me feel anxious/panicked.	3.52	1.22	Agree
A4. I feel helpless or stuck when I start a new writing assignment.	2.84	1.20	Moderate
A5. I worry my English grammar is too poor to be understood.	2.40	1.16	Disagree

Note. N = 72. Level is based on the interpretation bands in the Data Analysis section.

Organization of Ideas and Paragraph Coherence

Table 3 presents the five organization items. The construct mean was 2.94 (*SD* = 0.66; 95% CI [2.78, 3.10]), the lowest variability among the three challenge constructs. The highest-rated item was B1, struggling to organize ideas logically in an academic essay (*M* = 3.38, *SD* = 0.99), with which 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. The lowest-rated item was B4, difficulty using transitions (*M* = 2.52, *SD* = 1.01), with which 62% disagreed. For B2, difficulty writing a strong thesis statement (*M* = 2.72, *SD* = 0.97), 44% disagreed and 26% agreed. Means

for B3, developing supporting details (*M* = 3.04, *SD* = 1.03), and B5, writing introductions and conclusions (*M* = 3.02, *SD* = 1.10), were close to the scale midpoint. B1 (*M* = 3.38) was the highest of the five items and B4 (*M* = 2.52) the only one in the disagree band, whereas the other three fell within a narrow range (*M* = 2.72 to 3.04).

Table 3. *Organization of Ideas Items*

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
B1. I struggle to organize ideas logically in an academic essay.	3.38	0.99	Moderate
B2. Writing a strong thesis statement is difficult for me.	2.72	0.97	Moderate
B3. I find it hard to develop supporting details for my arguments.	3.04	1.03	Moderate
B4. I have difficulty using transitions (e.g., however, in contrast).	2.52	1.01	Disagree
B5. I struggle to write effective introductions and conclusions.	3.02	1.10	Moderate

Note. *N* = 72.

Effectiveness of the Feedback Process

Table 4 presents the five feedback items. The construct mean was 2.87 (*SD* = 0.77; 95% CI [2.69, 3.05]), the lowest of the three challenge constructs. The highest-rated item was C2, concerning the lack of peer-review opportunities (*M* = 3.24, *SD* = 1.02); 48% of respondents agreed, 28% were neutral, and 24% disagreed. Item C1, not receiving enough specific feedback from instructors (*M* = 2.92), had the largest standard deviation among the feedback items (*SD* = 1.24), and 54% of respondents agreed with it. Fifty percent agreed that teacher comments are often too vague (C3, *M* = 2.74, *SD* = 1.21). Means for C4, rarely getting the chance to revise after feedback, and C5, peer feedback activities being poorly structured, were 2.94 (*SD* = 1.02) and 2.52 (*SD* = 1.09), respectively. ⟦Authors to verify against SPSS output: the original text reported that 54% agreed with C5, which is inconsistent with its mean of 2.52, and that C2 was the "most positive" result although it has the highest mean; the statements above follow the table values and the C5 percentage has been removed.⟧

Table 4. *Feedback and Instruction Items*

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
C1. I do not receive enough specific feedback from my instructors.	2.92	1.24	Moderate
C2. Lack of peer-review opportunities hinders my writing growth.	3.24	1.02	Moderate
C3. Teacher comments are often too vague to help me improve.	2.74	1.21	Moderate
C4. I rarely get the chance to revise a paper after getting feedback.	2.94	1.02	Moderate
C5. Peer feedback activities are not well structured or guided.	2.52	1.09	Disagree

Note. *N* = 72.

Evaluation of Proposed Solutions

Table 5 shows that support for the proposed solutions was consistently high. The construct mean was 3.79 (*SD* = 0.98; 95% CI [3.56, 4.02]), and every solution reached at least 68% agreement. The strongest endorsement in the questionnaire was for D6, activities that connect short sentences into complex ones (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 1.18; 78% agreement), followed by D3, model essays or paragraphs before assignments (*M* = 3.88, *SD* = 1.29; 76%), D5, specific written suggestions for reorganizing paragraphs (*M* = 3.80, *SD* = 1.14; 72%), D4, an ungraded first-draft submission (*M* = 3.76, *SD* = 1.20; 70%), and D2, a checklist for peer feedback (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = 1.00; 70%). Writing essays in small groups (D1) received the lowest support (*M* = 3.54, *SD* = 1.23; 68%), and it was the only solution below 70% agreement. The standard

deviations for the solution items (1.00 to 1.29) were as large as those for the challenge items, so the high means reflect agreement by most respondents rather than the absence of disagreement.

Table 5. *Proposed Solutions Items*

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
D1. Writing an essay in small groups to decrease pressure.	3.54	1.23	Agree
D2. Using a specific checklist to give/receive peer feedback.	3.68	1.00	Agree
D3. Providing model essays/paragraphs as examples before assignments.	3.88	1.29	Agree
D4. Allowing an ungraded first draft submission to reduce anxiety.	3.76	1.20	Agree
D5. Teachers giving specific written suggestions to reorganize paragraphs.	3.80	1.14	Agree
D6. Practical activities connecting short sentences into complex ones.	4.10	1.18	Agree

Note. $N = 72$.

Relationships Among Constructs and Differences by Year of Study

Table 6 summarizes the four constructs. Writing anxiety ($M = 2.93$), organization of ideas ($M = 2.94$), and feedback ($M = 2.87$) were all in the moderate band, whereas support for solutions ($M = 3.79$) was in the agree band. Table 7 shows that the three challenge constructs were positively intercorrelated, with coefficients from .39 to .42 (all $p < .001$). Support for solutions correlated more weakly with anxiety ($r = .24$, $p = .042$), organization ($r = .33$, $p = .005$), and feedback ($r = .21$, $p = .077$), the last of which was not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Table 6. *Construct-Level Summary*

Construct	Items	*M*	*SD*	95% CI	Level
Writing anxiety (A1–A5)	5	2.93	0.86	[2.73, 3.13]	Moderate
Organization of ideas (B1–B5)	5	2.94	0.66	[2.78, 3.10]	Moderate
Feedback and instruction (C1–C5)	5	2.87	0.77	[2.69, 3.05]	Moderate
Proposed solutions (D1–D6)	6	3.79	0.98	[3.56, 4.02]	Agree

Note. $N = 72$. CI = confidence interval for the mean.

Table 7. *Pearson Correlations Among Constructs*

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Writing anxiety	—			
2. Organization of ideas	.39***	—		
3. Feedback and instruction	.40***	.42***	—	
4. Proposed solutions	.24*	.33**	.21	—

Note. $N = 72$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Table 8 presents construct means by year of study. Junior students reported slightly higher anxiety ($M = 2.98$) and organizational difficulty ($M = 2.98$) than senior students ($M = 2.85$ and $M = 2.88$, respectively). Senior students reported more feedback-related difficulty than juniors ($M = 2.96$ vs. $M = 2.81$), and juniors showed marginally stronger support for the proposed solutions ($M = 3.86$ vs. $M = 3.70$). No inferential tests were applied to these group comparisons, and the differences between the groups did not exceed 0.15 points on any

construct. Across both groups, the pattern of support for solutions (*M* = 3.70 to 3.86) was higher than that for any challenge construct (*M* = 2.81 to 2.98).

Table 8. *Construct Means by Year of Study*

Year of study	Anxiety	Organization	Feedback	Solutions
Junior (*n* = 30) ⟦verify n⟧	2.98	2.98	2.81	3.86
Senior (*n* = 22)	2.85	2.88	2.96	3.70

Note. The group sizes (30 + 22 = 52) do not sum to N = 72, and the grouping of Years 1–4 into "junior" and "senior" is not defined in the original manuscript; authors to define the groups and correct the counts.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to profile the writing anxiety, organizational difficulties, and feedback experiences of English majors at Kabul University and to identify the solutions they support. The discussion first relates the results to each research question, offers an interpretation of each finding, and compares it with earlier research, and then considers pedagogical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Writing Anxiety and Performance Conditions

Students reported moderate writing anxiety overall (*M* = 2.93), but the pattern across items was uneven. Time limits produced the highest anxiety (*M* = 3.52), followed by pressure to produce a perfect first draft (*M* = 3.00), whereas worry about grammatical adequacy was the lowest (*M* = 2.40) and the only anxiety item in the disagree band. A plausible interpretation is that, for these students, anxiety is triggered more by the conditions under which writing is produced and judged than by a perceived lack of linguistic competence. This reading is consistent with the cognitive component of anxiety in Cheng's (2004) model, in which fear of evaluation and of falling short of a standard is central, and with Hasanzoy et al.'s (2019) report that Afghan EFL students' anxiety is associated with evaluation, examinations, assignments, and limited time. It also agrees with evidence from other settings that anxiety is shaped by instructional conditions (Kurniasih et al., 2024; Mudra, 2023; Nor & Senom, 2024). The result differs, however, from Noori's (2020) finding that Kabul University English majors struggled with the language of academic writing. The difference may reflect what each study measured: Noori asked about difficulties, whereas the present items asked about anxiety, and students may feel linguistically capable while still feeling pressured by deadlines and by the expectation of a flawless draft. Differences in cohorts and in the instruments used could also contribute, and because the data are self-reported, students' confidence about their grammar may not match their actual accuracy.

Organization Above the Sentence Level

The organization results show a contrast between local and global skills. Students rated logical organization of an essay as their greatest difficulty (B1, *M* = 3.38), while the use of transitions (B4, *M* = 2.52) and thesis statements (B2, *M* = 2.72) was the least problematic, and supporting details and introductions and conclusions fell near the midpoint. This pattern suggests that students feel more secure with discrete devices that can be learned as forms than with

sequencing ideas across a whole text, which requires decisions about what to include, in what order, and how each part supports the central claim (Swales & Feak, 2012). The finding refines Noori's (2020) general conclusion that structure is problematic for Kabul University English majors by locating the difficulty more precisely at the level of overall logic. It should be read with caution, because students' reported ease with transitions does not show that they use them appropriately, and an analysis of writing samples would be needed to confirm the contrast.

Feedback as an Underused Resource

Feedback received the lowest construct mean of the three challenge areas (*M* = 2.87), yet the item pattern points to specific weaknesses rather than general dissatisfaction. The scarcity of peer-review opportunities was the highest-rated problem (C2, *M* = 3.24), half of the students found teacher comments too vague (C3), and a majority (54%) did not receive enough specific feedback (C1). The large standard deviation for C1 (*SD* = 1.24) indicates that experiences are polarized, which may mean that the amount of specific feedback differs between courses or instructors, although the present data cannot confirm this. The low rating for the statement that peer feedback is poorly structured (C5, *M* = 2.52), together with strong support for a peer-feedback checklist (D2, *M* = 3.68), is not contradictory: if peer review is rarely practiced, students have little basis for judging its structure but can still see the value of guidance. These findings fit the argument that feedback becomes useful only when students are equipped to understand and use it (Carless & Boud, 2018), and they parallel evidence that peer feedback can rival teacher feedback in improving writing when students are trained to give it (Cui et al., 2021). The result for C4, limited opportunity to revise (*M* = 2.94), is also relevant, because the benefits of feedback reported by Du and Zhang (2026) depended on repeated opportunities to revise, which many students here appear to lack.

Student-Endorsed Solutions

Support for all six proposed solutions was high (*M* = 3.79), with strongest endorsement of sentence-combining activities (D6, *M* = 4.10), model texts (D3, *M* = 3.88), and specific written suggestions for reorganizing paragraphs (D5, *M* = 3.80). These choices correspond closely to the diagnosed difficulties: sentence combining and model texts address the connection and sequencing of ideas that students found hardest (B1), written suggestions address the specificity of feedback (C1 and C3), and an ungraded first draft (D4, *M* = 3.76) and a peer-feedback checklist (D2, *M* = 3.68) address time and perfection pressure (A2 and A3) and peer review (C2). Model texts are also consistent with genre-based approaches that make the conventions of academic writing explicit before students write (Swales & Feak, 2012), and an ungraded draft with a chance to revise echoes the low-stakes, repeated-revision conditions associated with lower anxiety in Du and Zhang's (2026) study. Two cautions apply. First, students' endorsement shows acceptability, not effectiveness, and the near-uniform agreement may partly reflect the tendency to agree with positively worded items. Second, collective work (D1, *M* = 3.54) was the least supported solution, which may indicate that

students doubt that group writing would reduce pressure for individually assessed work, although this explanation is untested.

Interrelations and Differences by Year of Study

The three challenge constructs were moderately and positively correlated (*r* = .39 to .42), so students who reported more anxiety also tended to report more difficulty with organization and with feedback. This supports the view that the three areas are connected facets of the writing experience and not independent problems, in line with the argument that affective and instructional conditions interact in EFL writing (Cheng, 2004; Du & Zhang, 2026). The correlational and cross-sectional design, however, does not show the direction of these links, and a student who writes poorly may report more anxiety because of the difficulty, or the reverse. Support for solutions was only weakly related to the challenges, and not significantly to feedback (*r* = .21), which suggests that interest in these solutions is widely shared regardless of how severe an individual student's difficulties are. The year-of-study comparison showed that seniors reported slightly more feedback difficulty than juniors (2.96 vs. 2.81). One possible explanation is that advanced courses place greater demands on feedback than students currently receive, but the differences are small, were not tested, and rest on unequal groups, so they should be treated as exploratory.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings point to changes that are specific, inexpensive, and linked to what students reported. Because time pressure was the strongest anxiety trigger and perfectionism the second, instructors could divide timed writing tasks into planning, drafting, and revising stages, and could treat a first draft as an ungraded working text that receives comments before a graded final version. This also addresses the limited chance to revise reported by students (C4) and follows the conditions linked to reduced anxiety by Du and Zhang (2026). Because students found the logical sequencing of whole essays more difficult than individual devices, instruction could pair model essays with tasks that expose their overall organization, such as asking students to outline a model, identify the function of each paragraph, and then reorder a scrambled text, with sentence-combining practice as a complementary exercise for connecting ideas within paragraphs (Swales & Feak, 2012). Because feedback was seen as insufficiently specific and peer review as scarce, instructors could replace general or grade-only comments with a few concrete, written suggestions on structure, and could introduce peer review only after short training and with a checklist, since trained peer feedback has been found to work as well as teacher feedback for improving writing (Cui et al., 2021; Carless & Boud, 2018). At the program level, the department could coordinate the amount and form of feedback across writing courses, given the polarized responses to C1, and could include feedback literacy and anxiety-sensitive task design in the preparation of writing instructors.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be considered. The sample came from one department at one university and included only male students, so the findings cannot be generalized to female

students or to other institutions. The sample of 72 students corresponds to a 10% margin of error at the 95% confidence level for a population of 278, which is acceptable for an exploratory descriptive study but wider than the 5% conventionally sought, and a larger sample would give more precise estimates. ⟦Authors to state accurately how respondents were selected, since the Methods describe stratified random sampling while the distribution through Google Forms implies some self-selection.⟧ The data are self-reported and cross-sectional, so they describe students' perceptions at one time, not their actual writing performance, and they cannot establish causal relationships among anxiety, organization, and feedback. The questionnaire also contained only positively worded solution items, and two items combined two ideas (D2 and D4), which may have inflated agreement and limited interpretation. Future research should replicate the survey with a larger and more diverse sample, combine it with analyses of students' writing samples and with interviews to explain the patterns reported here, include instructors' perspectives on feedback, and test the endorsed solutions, especially sentence combining, model texts, and staged drafting, in classroom intervention studies.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the academic writing difficulties of undergraduate English majors at Kabul University are moderate in size, interrelated, and concentrated in the conditions and structure of writing instruction more than in sentence-level accuracy. Time pressure and the demand for a flawless first draft were the main sources of anxiety, whereas worry about grammar was low; logical sequencing across a whole essay was harder for students than transitions or thesis statements; and feedback was seen as limited chiefly in peer-review opportunities, specificity, and chances to revise. Students strongly supported solutions that match these difficulties, notably sentence combining, model texts, specific written suggestions, and low-stakes drafting.

The study contributes a jointly measured, item-level profile of three challenge areas and of student-endorsed solutions in an under-researched EFL context, extending earlier work that examined writing difficulties and anxiety separately (Noori, 2020; Miri & Joia, 2018). Its practical value is that it identifies where instruction can change at low cost, namely task timing, draft stages, model-based teaching of organization, and the specificity and structure of feedback. For teacher education and curriculum planning, the results suggest that preparing instructors to design low-stakes drafting stages, to teach organization through models, and to give specific, usable feedback may do more to reduce students' difficulties than additional grammar instruction. Future studies that add writing samples, interviews, and instructor perspectives, and that test the endorsed solutions in classroom interventions, would show whether the perceptions reported here translate into better writing. In the meantime, the profile presented here gives instructors and the department a defensible, student-informed basis for deciding what to change first. Given the single-department, male-

only, self-reported sample, these conclusions are best treated as a baseline for local curriculum decisions and as hypotheses for larger and intervention-based studies.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the study and the preparation of the manuscript. Murtaza Malekzada*[1] led the project, developed the initial concept, reviewed the relevant literature, organized the questionnaire using Google Forms, and prepared the initial and final drafts of the manuscript. He also revised the manuscript in response to feedback received during the writing process. Abdul Basit Alimyar2 contributed to the analysis and presentation of the findings, conducted the thematic analysis, and assisted in interpreting the data. Qyamudin Ziar3 improved the overall structure of the manuscript, finalized the Discussion and Conclusion sections, and revised these sections in response to the feedback received. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript for submission and accept responsibility for its content and integrity.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this study.

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Data Availability Statement

The anonymized questionnaire data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality requirements.

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