An innovative approach for delivering academic writing courses

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The development of academic writing skills is imperative for graduate students and young researchers who intend to pursue research or a career in academia. However, currently, the curricula in Romanian universities seldom offer support in this area. In this context, we present a four-module programme for delivering academic writing courses that have been successfully implemented in a Romanian university and can be easily replicated. Furthermore, this study provides viable strategies and offers specific and general findings regarding doctoral students' learning needs, challenges and opportunities at the institutional level.

Keywords: Academic writing skills, career management, project management, writing instruction.

EUROPEAN research universities are facing a constant process of decline in the English writing and publishing skills of students against an ever-increasing pressure for research publications. This article presents the development and assessment of efficiency of an English academic writing (AW) programme implemented at Babeş-Bolyai University, a Romanian research-focused university, by offering insights into the following: (a) an intervention programme for English AW integrating formal writing across and in the disciplines (AID) modules with informal writing skills, and writing and publishing career development modules; (b) perceived and assessed efficiency of the programme; and (c) opportunities and challenges encountered at the institutional level. The intervention targeted doctoral students from different disciplines, and doctoral schools and with/without previous writing experience. This article not only suggests viable strategies to address the learning needs, challenges and opportunities of doctoral students at the institutional level, but also discusses the way in which the intervention is perceived in terms of efficiency and methodological approach.

Designing the intervention: description of the module

Academic writing programmes in English are dedicated to improve professional performance at the MD or Ph D level, where research results should be rapidly put into practice[1–3]. Meanwhile, institutions are interested in developing such programmes to increase the publishing rate and assure international visibility of the research results[4].

The targeted academic writing skills required structured training programmes as they cannot be otherwise osmotically acquired[5,6]. As a result, several strategies have been developed, such as programmes based on the learners and their learning needs[7–9] or those that can be delivered to a non-selected group based on discipline, as writing in the disciplines requires specific conventions, is epistemological, and aims to acquire social practices[10,11] and combined approaches[12].

The AW programme structure relies on the shared purpose of writing and community discourse conventions as well as on the existing teaching traditions at the institutional level[9,10,13].

Before designing the programme structure, the learning needs of the doctoral students were analysed with the help of a questionnaire and focus group. A 16-item questionnaire was developed based on the tools that have been used in the field of academic writing[14], but are adapted to the specificity of the doctoral students in the target group whose second language is English. The rationale for the programme design was partially based on direct observations and conclusions drawn from hands-on experience for Ph D candidates at Babeş-Bolyai University. As part of its own development strategy, the university applied for structural and cohesion funds available at that time through the SOPHRD 2007–2013. Hundreds of doctoral candidates in three consecutive cohorts (i.e. 2008, 2009 and 2010 enrolment) in natural sciences, humanities and socio-economic studies were financed throughout their Ph D programme. The financial package usually covered monthly fellowships, costs of national and international

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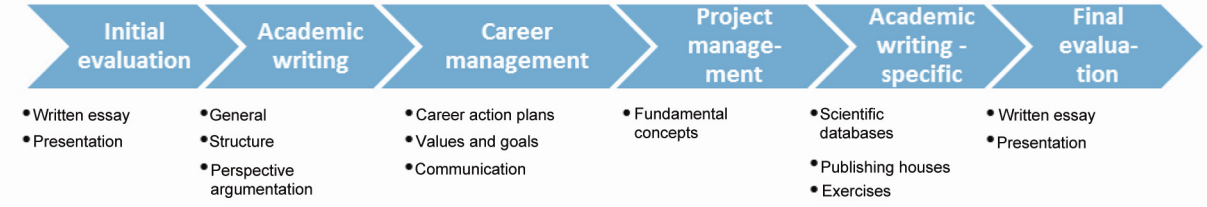

Figure 1. Basic timeline of the intervention.

mobility, and participations in conferences and training modules. For the first time in a formal and general framework, The university offered the Ph D candidates the opportunity to acquire skills and competencies needed for a successful career in research. Alongside academic writing, which retains the central role, the training topics largely appreciated by students were project management and career management, both of which were regarded as transferable skills which can positively impact their future career.

The course was structured in four modules: academic writing – general, career development, and project management, and academic writing – specific. Figure 1 presents the basic timeline of the programme.

Academic writing – general

The course modules are based on the writing AID approach that was developed in an application-driven research project at Vienna University[15–18]. This general framework combines and integrates the principles of the traditional writing across the curriculum (WAC)[19] and writing in the disciplines (WID)[20] approaches, often perceived to be opposites or even mutually exclusive in practice. The writing AID approach was developed with the aim of acquiring the strengths while counterbalancing the limitations of the risks of over-generalization and exclusionary focus. This was born out of necessity, but has proven successful in more than 500 courses over the last 8 years since its first implementation: without the dedicated resources to field either WAC or WID programmes, teaching academic writing at any university includes highly interdisciplinary groups as well as those of mixed study level (i.e. Bachelor's and Master's programmes, Master's and Ph D programmes), precluding a pure WAC or WID approach.

Writing AID provides a didactic framework and toolkit for designing and implementing academic writing courses. Its research base is socio-linguistics, and its implementation accordingly focuses on the linguistic and social aspects of writing[21]. The framework can, therefore, accommodate a wide variety of potentially necessary modifications and adaptations for specific student groups and teaching scenarios. The didactic framework represents a 'translation' of the underlying linguistic theories and research into guidelines and principles of teaching academic writing, right down to the terminology, exercises, and text feedback[22–24]. The framework also suggests the following main categories for teaching academic writing: style, text structure, perspective, the 'red thread' or reading flow, argumentation, genres/text types and the writing process. These labels were chosen to be comprehensible and clear as well as to capture the practical side of the underlying linguistic analyses. Accordingly, the course modules for German and English focus on the following:

(1) Style is an often a vague impression of 'how students write' compared to the established academics in the respective fields, characteristically centred on issues of personalized/impersonalized discourse. This involves linguistic features, such as the use of personal pronouns, the passive, nominalization, compounding, hedging in general, and hedged performatives in particular, as well as the (re)presentation of previous work, the research process, and interpretations and conclusions. While some of these are quite general, there are broad, discipline-typical specifications to be accommodated and addressed as well.

(2) Text structure is a multi-level phenomenon that supporting and structuring both the writing and the reading process. Academic texts follow several general structuring principles (e.g. sequential and hierarchical structuring, use of headings, logical/rhetorical structures, etc.), but many disciplines have developed a preferred sequence or even a default set of sections or chapters. The multiple levels of structure covered in the course modules include framing elements, such as lists and acknowledgments, core chapters/sections such as introduction, literature review and empirical work, usage of subsections/subchapters, internal composition and sequencing of chapters/sections (in terms of functional stages) as well as usage of paragraphs and formating for the purpose of text structuring.

(3) Perspective is a summary term to describe the ways in which authors of academic texts express or mark their relationships to, attitudes to, or assessments of either previous research or publications (i.e. other people's work), the present text (their own current work) or empirical reality (the object of study). All three areas involve similar but distinct strategies and use of linguistic resources provided by the respective language. This broad but crucial field includes, but is not limited to, the conventions of citing and referencing.

(4) The 'red thread' or reading flow covers, in essence, the linguistic phenomenon of thematic progression, that is, the conventions and necessities of linking theme and rheme across sentences and even paragraphs as well as text coherence marked by explicit clues, such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical items.

(5) Argumentation covers, first, the distinction between description, explanation and explication. Secondly, it details with academic usage of argumentative patterns as well as rhetorical alternatives (e.g. claim–conclusion, question–answer and problem–solution), and the effects of primacy and regency in such patterns. Appropriate attention to linguistic resources to mark and facilitate such argumentation is given where necessary.

(6) Genres/text types are covered in a selective manner and appropriate to the study level or academic proficiency of the student groups. These include abstracts, journal papers, poster presentations, seminar papers and MA or Ph D theses. Incorporating a genre-analytic approach, these text types are treated as specifications of general 'academic writing principles' for a specific purpose and audience by following recurring and therefore recognizable patterns (in some or all of the above-described areas).

(7) The writing process is discussed in terms of a sequence of (often cyclic) steps, each manageable by specific writing strategies/techniques. At the same time, however, the text, the focus of the previously described categories, is always regarded as the outcome of precisely this process. Thus, the so-called 'process' and 'product perspective' of academic writing are combined in this approach.

In all matters, the course modules make extensive use of authentic text examples (i.e. not constructed for the purposes of the exercises or tasks) which may or may not need to be adapted for specific course settings and/or student groups. Didactically, the course modules combine several strategies and social forms, including activation, elicitation, reading, input/instruction, analysis, group activities and plenum discussions.

Career management module

This was designed based on two components: general and specific. The general component is common to the entire group of sciences under the area of humanistic studies and natural sciences. In this part, general concepts and career processes were presented and discussed. Each participant applied the presented concepts and processes to describe his/her own career progress. Specific competencies requested in the early stages of a research career were debated and analysed. Tools for evaluation and self-evaluation of competencies were presented. The specific part of the module was dedicated to developing action plans for a research career based on self-evaluation of the areas of interest values and specific goals. The role of developing academic writing skills and publication skills was discussed as part of the individual action plans.

Project management

The course material was widely based on the project cycle management model proposed by the Project Management Institute (PMI) through PMBook®. This is one of the two leading project management methodologies (the second one being PRINCE, the UK Government standard for information systems projects) extensively used by professionals across sectors and industries.

Due to time constraints, the course was designed as an introductory one-day perspective to the PMI methodology with the principal purpose of creating awareness among participants about project management. The course was designed with the intent of clarifying a set of concepts that are the underlying fundamentals of any project management activity. More precisely, the course material touched upon the following subjects: (a) definition of 'project' and 'project management'; (b) relationship among project, programme, and portfolio; (c) stakeholders and strategic planning; (d) role of a project manager and key elements defining this fundamental function, and (e) needs assessment processes, project design, and main instruments employed (e.g. problem tree, objective tree, SWOT analysis, logical framework matrix). The course material included multiple exercises to illustrate, in a more practical manner, the conceptual framework and theoretical background.

In its last part, the course design introduced a series of elements of project implementation with a focus on human resources management. A test (i.e. Belbin Test) was applied to elicit opinions and reactions from the participants towards the main typologies generally present in a team environment. Other subjects addressed were elements of communication, leadership and time management. The course ended with a brief introduction into monitoring (and reporting) as a key phase in the cycle of standard project management practices.

Academic writing – specific

The specific module was divided in two parts. In the first part, students were presented with information about scientific databases and international publishing houses for half a day (4 h) with a focus on two fundamental issues related to publishing, namely access to scientific literature/on-line publishing houses and ISI indexing of journals, and strategies for publication. The presentation was made by experienced researchers. The second part began with a 2-h presentation entitled 'Guide to writing a research manuscript', intended to represent a quick and concise introduction into the main aspects related to

writing a good scientific article. Based on the appropriate chosen examples across all disciplines, the presentation was focused on describing the most common practices used for sectioning a regular article, that is, abstract, introduction, materials/methods/experimental, results/discussion/conclusions, references, acknowledgements, and appendix/supplementary information, as well as the specific information that should be provided in each of these sections. Special emphasis was placed on the idea that the title of an article is the first hook to its prospective audience, and also the fact that readers often use the abstract to decide whether they want to read the rest of the paper or not. As such, tips and tricks about how to choose an adequate title for a work, and to write a good abstract were also given. The presentation was followed by a series of writing exercises (i.e. summarizing and reviewing) related to the fields of research and guided by invited researchers with writing and publishing experience.

Evaluation

The pre- and post-evaluations targeted writing and presentation skills using the criteria presented in Appendices 1 and 2 and their corresponding scores (from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest).

Implementation

Implementation of the experiment took place between March and June 2014. Master's and doctoral students as well as early career researchers at Babeş-Bolyai University were invited to enrol. The total enrolment was 140 candidates (through the dedicated website www.academic-writing.ro), out of which 25 were Master's students, 89 doctoral candidates and 25 young researchers. Among the candidates, 59 had no previous publishing experience, whereas 139 were not exposed to any sort of training in academic writing. For the initial evaluation, 67 of the total enrolled were present: 10 Master's students, 49 doctoral candidates, and 8 early career researchers from various departments of the university.

The training began with a needs analysis applied through a focus group approach based on four questions (starting with a more general question and then narrowing): What do I want to discover? What do I want to learn? What do I want to know how to do? Which are my learning objectives? The majority of answers indicated that the students expected to (a) improve their writing skills; (b) 'decipher the secrets' of academic writing; (c) master appropriate writing techniques and methods, and (d) be exposed to specific details (e.g. structure of a scientific article). The learning objectives with high frequency were as follows: coherence, clarity, efficiency, argumentation, logical structure and fulfilment of standards. The candidates were encouraged to freely express their opinion regarding the writing process. Their answers were divided into three main categories: positive, neutral and negative. The number of respondents that described their approach towards writing in negative terms was equal to the number of individuals who described their experience in neutral and positive terms. These results can be correlated with the writing inhibition phenomenon and underline once more the importance of one's outlook in the writing process.

A second needs analysis, which was conducted using a questionnaire, revealed that the main issues which the subjects confronted were writing and publishing methods, project management, presentation skills and fundraising for research projects. The analysis also showed that the lack of experience in publishing creates false perceptions about the writing and publishing process and about the real needs related to developing these skills. It also confirmed the utility of all the four modules that were to be delivered in the training course: academic writing (general), career management, project management and academic writing (specific).

Calendar of the training programme

1. Initial evaluation
2. Academic writing – general module: over seven days in March and April 2014. The course material was divided into four parts. The first part was given to all participants (after the official launch of the programme), and the next three parts were given to groups based on participants from a larger area of expertise (i.e. natural sciences/social sciences).
3. Career management module: over two days (10 and 17 May 2014).
4. Project management module: over two days (24 and 31 May 2014).
5. Academic writing specific for certain domains/writing workshops: over two days. The first day was dedicated to a writing intervention/scientific paper review (2 h) and applied exercises about how to write sections of a scientific paper (5 h). Publishing and international publishing houses were the focus for half a day (4 h).
6. Final evaluation.

Results and discussion

During the entire programme (four modules), 25 participants were present for the final evaluation, out of which 21 were Ph D students (84%), 1 Master's student (4%), and 3 young researchers (12%). Ph D students were probably the most motivated to attend the entire programme, as they are required to publish at least two papers to receive their degree.

Figures 2 and 3 present boxplots of the initial and final scores for oral and written evaluations. A Wilcoxon

sum-rank test confirms that the differences between the final and initial evaluations, with the exception of component V5 (vocabulary), can be considered statistically significant. Overall, these results indicate the success of the intervention with respect to the variables measured in the evaluation grids. The fact that there was no improvement in the vocabulary component may be explained by the fact that the students were more focused on improving their writing in terms of clarity and structure than vocabulary. However, an improvement in vocabulary is expected to occur naturally with time.

For each student, the average score was computed for the written and oral evaluations. To further analyse the results, the difference between the final and initial values of this average was computed and analysed considering

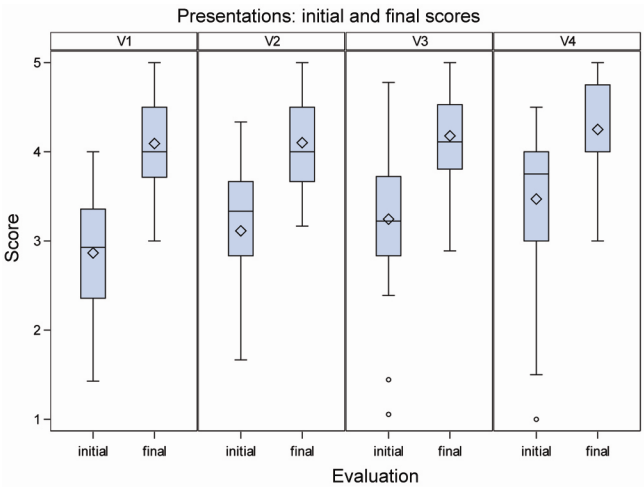

Figure 2. Results of the evaluation of oral presentations. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicates that the difference between median values of the final and initial evaluations for each criterion is significant.

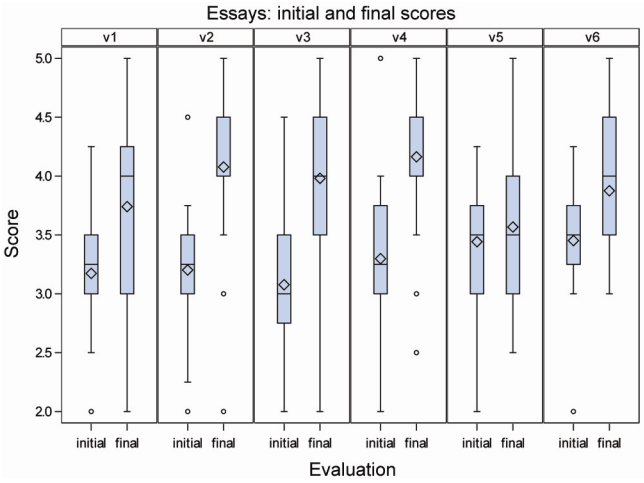

Figure 3. Results of evaluation of written essays. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicates that the difference between median values of the final and initial evaluations for each criterion is significant, except for criterion V5 for vocabulary.

different categories, namely gender, field and level of study. In Figures 4 and 5, these differences are represented as side-by-side boxplots for each category. Furthermore, the data show that some of these differences have negative values: for three essays and one presentation, with the highest of one point (–1). These negative values indicate that, in some cases, the response to the course format was as expected.

Regarding the distribution by gender (Figure 4), as expected, there are no statistical differences between the two sexes. Both groups have positive mean and median values that are close to each other, with higher improvements in the presentation scores.

From the distribution of the essay scores by level of study (Figure 5, left), it is obvious that the impact of the course is visible only for Ph D and postdoctoral students, whereas for the Master's student (only one participated to the entire programme), it is actually negative. An explanation for this is that Master's students are not necessarily planning a research career and may be less interested in academic writing. However, the fact that the same Master's student had improved his score for presentation skill illustrates the interest in this form of communication, which is required for Master's students.

Ph D and postdoctoral students were generally more aware of the importance of academic writing and communication skills for their programmes and careers, and thus were more interested in this course. Results show that all the participants have improved their scores, with higher differences for Ph D students for the written evaluation. They also seem to focus more on improving their presentation skills.

Figure 6 presents the distribution of differences over the field of study, divided between hard and soft sciences. Again, the boxplots show that there is no reason to suspect statistical differences between the two groups.

Conclusion and future work

Academic writing skills are strongly linked to an academic or research career; therefore, improvement in AW skills development is a key factor for achieving success, in both disseminating results and securing funding through grant proposals. Here, we propose an academic writing training programme which integrates both general and specific academic writing modules with project and career management modules to offer students a set of useful tools to assist them in future decisions. The programme was evaluated using pre- and post-tests consisting of writing an essay and giving a scientific presentation.

The programme was tested on a group of volunteer graduate students and young researchers. The results demonstrate that 88% of the participating students showed an improvement in the scores between the

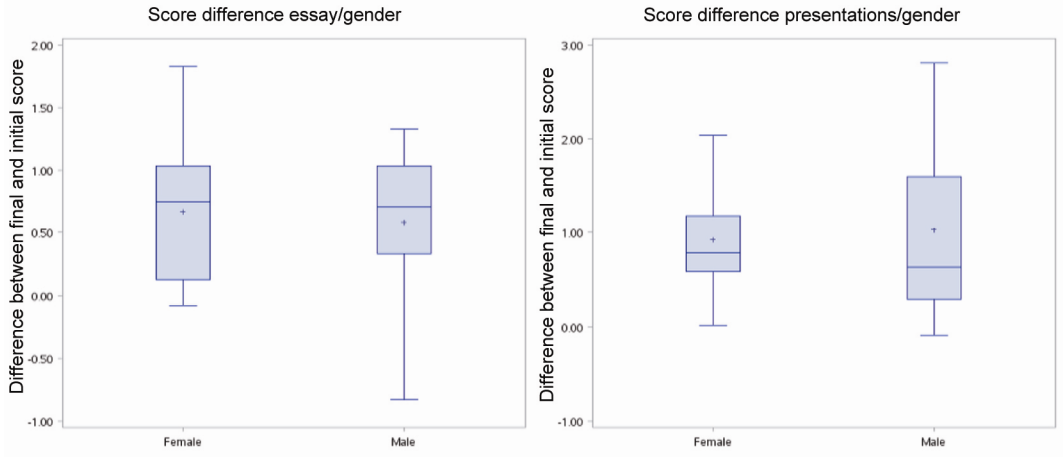

Figure 4. Distribution of the differences in scores by gender.

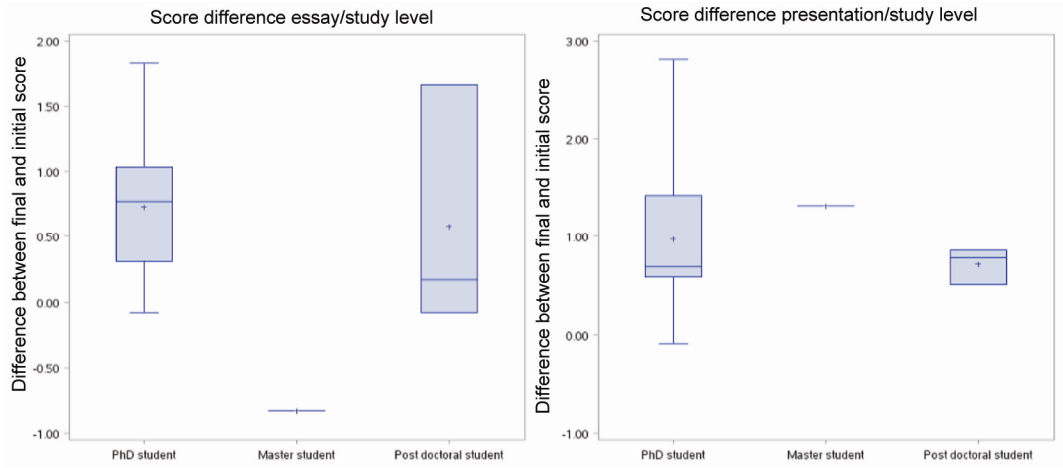

Figure 5. Distribution of scores by level of study.

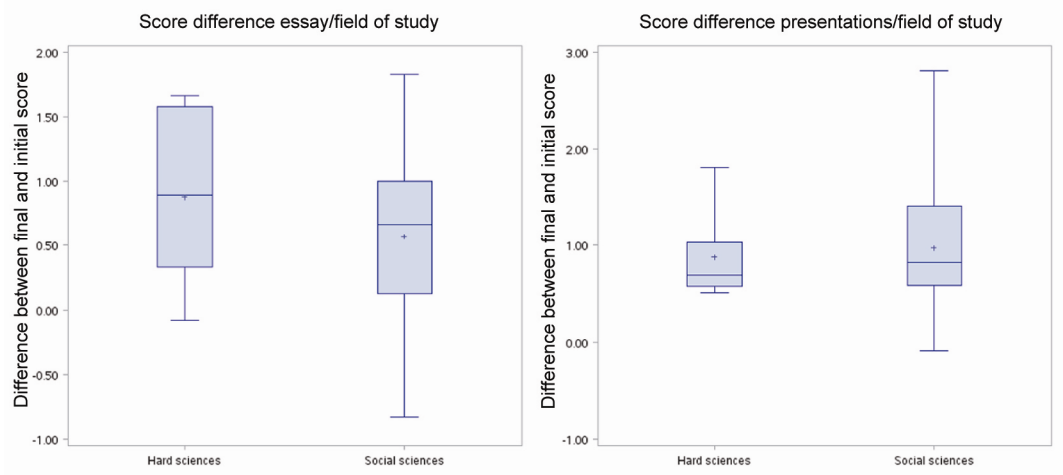

Figure 6. Distribution of scores by field of study.

pre- and post-tests, thereby indicating the potential of this four-module approach.

The main advantage of such a programme lies in its form and content adaptability. It may be replicated in different formats, either as such, as a course integrated in the graduate curricula, or as a one-week training module. As the programme was designed, implemented and tested by an interdisciplinary team, we recommend a similar

Appendix 1. Evaluation criteria for written essays

V1. Global impression
1. Largely disregards the specific task directions and/or demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing.
2. Demonstrates some competence in addressing the specific task directions, in analysing the issue and in conveying meaning, but is obviously flawed.
3. A competent analysis of the issue and conveys meaning with acceptable clarity.
4. A generally thoughtful, well-developed analysis of the issue and conveys meaning clearly.
5. A cogent, well-articulated analysis of the issue and conveys meaning skillfully.

V2. Organization of text
1. Provides little or no evidence of understanding the issue.
2. Is unclear or seriously limited in addressing the specific task directions and in presenting or developing a position on the issue or both.
3. Is vague or limited in addressing the specific task directions and in presenting or developing a position on the issue or both.
4. Presents a clear position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.
5. Presents a clear and well-considered position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task/articulates a clear and insightful position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.

V3. Argumentation
1. Provides little or no evidence of the ability to develop an organized response (e.g. is disorganized and/or extremely brief).
2. Provides few, if any, relevant reasons or examples in support of its claims.
3. Is weak in the use of relevant reasons or examples or relies largely on unsupported claims.
4. Develops the position with relevant reasons and/or examples.
5. Develops the position with logically sound reasons and/or well-chosen examples/develops the position fully with compelling reasons and/or persuasive examples.

V4. Red thread
1. Has severe problems in language and sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning.
2. Is poorly focused and/or poorly organized.
3. Is limited in focus and/or organization.
4. Is adequately focused and organized.
5. Is focused and generally well organized, connecting ideas appropriately/sustains a well-focused, well-organized analysis, connecting ideas logically.

V5. Vocabulary
1. Contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage or mechanics that result in incoherence.
2. Has serious problems in language and sentence structure that frequently interfere with meaning.
3. Has problems in language and sentence structure that result in a lack of clarity.
4. Demonstrates sufficient control of language to express ideas with acceptable clarity.
5. Conveys ideas clearly and well, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence variety/conveys ideas fluently and precisely, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety.

V6. Clarity and coherence
1. Contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage or mechanics that result in incoherence.
2. Contains serious errors in grammar, usage or mechanics that frequently obscure meaning.
3. Contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage or mechanics that can interfere with meaning.
4. Generally demonstrates control of the conventions of standard written English, but may have some errors.
5. Demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English, but may have minor errors/demonstrates superior facility with the conventions of standard written English (i.e. grammar, usage and mechanics), but may have minor errors.

replication by an interdisciplinary team that also has the opportunity to promote it at the institutional level as a tool to support research results, dissemination and visibility. With regard to the content, while maintaining the framework created by considering the four key aspects of academic writing (i.e. general and specific academic writing, and career and project management), what is actually delivered to students is continuously tailored to their needs identified each time through the needs analysis at the beginning of the programme. Particularly in Romania, such programmes are necessary as they offer graduate students the tools to succeed in the very competitive world of scientific research.

In addition, the investigation of the students' needs led to the analyses of the perceived importance of academic writing courses at institutional level as a secondary

Appendix 2. Criteria for evaluating oral presentations

CONTENT

Definition of the research area

1. Title not connected – it has no connection with the proposed research.
2. Title – vague/very general – does not provide specific information about what is the focus of the research.
3. General delimitation of research area – the title provides scarce information about the research topic.
4. Clear delimitation of research area/sustained by introductory ideas.
5. Clear delimitation of research area adequate introduction.

Reasoning

1. Reasoning is not provided or provided but without connection to the area of interest.
2. Vague, it provides some general idea about the importance of the area of interest.
3. It provides argumentation over the importance of the research area, however omitting to place emphasis/describe role of the research topic within the area.
4. It provides argumentation over the importance of the research area, while also describing in a general manner the role of the research topic within the broader research area.
5. It argues coherently/with specifics and sound reasoning the importance of the research area, the place and role of research topic within the broader research area.

Conceptual clarifications – presentation of concepts in line with terminology used in theories/models that are background for research/discussion of data and results

1. It provides some conceptual clarifications/vague reference or missing reference to theories and models.
2. Concepts/theories presented superficially or in a general manner, without proper and structured argumentation.
3. Concepts are presented in a clear manner, structured and in relation with model and theories – structured argumentation over the choice of key concepts – theory and model.
4. Concepts and theories presented fluidly and coherently, but without much dynamism and passion/theoretical models are adequate and presented chronologically – limits are provided.
5. Clear concepts – evident and cursive relationship among concepts/attractive and dynamic presentation/adequate theoretical models – arguments over choosing the research topic based on presented concepts and chosen models.

Relationships between concepts presented and the research question/research phenomenon – state-of-the-art/studies/research/sustained empirical observations.

1. Research problem is described vaguely – there is no reference to state of the art/other relevant research/empirical studies.
2. Defined research problem – there are little references to state-of-the art/other research/empirical studies.
3. Research problem is defined specifically – there are a number of references to state-of-the art/other research/empirical studies.
4. Research problem is presented in a structured, coherent manner with references to state-of art/previous research.
5. Choice of research problem is presented in a structured, coherent manner – choice was made based on state-of-art – limits – new research questions – new approaches insufficiently developed with specific references to latest studies and trends.

Research objective/hypothesis/research question

1. Formulated vaguely.
2. Formulated partially – without proper placement in the presented context.
3. Summarized – integrated in the context.
4. Formulated precisely – there is argumentation over placement in the context. There are references to potential results
5. Stems logically from the previous structure – is placed within the area defined by the title and provides possible resolution to the initial question.

Argumentation over chosen methodology – advantages and limits of the proposed methodology.

1. Choice is very general, is not based on specific argumentation.
2. Methodological approach is general – limits of the methodology are stated in a general manner.
3. Selection of methodology is specific – there is emphasis on advantages and limitations.
4. Methodology is selected based on argumentation – limits and advantages are presented with other possible methodological approaches that might compensate identified limits.
5. Complex methodology – selected based on models/state-of-the-art theories – argumentation over choice is provided and other approaches are identified to compensate for existing limitations.

Presentation of results

1. Expected results – described generally.
2. Expected results are presented superficially, without any comparative analysis with objectives/raised research questions.

(*Contd*)

Appendix 2. (*Contd*)

3. Results are specific, in connection with the proposed objectives.
4. Expected results are specific, with potential limits and implications over research objectives.
5. Results are detailed and with argumentation – limits and implications are correct – strategy to mitigate limits are present and new approaches are identified and proposed.

Slides

Structure of presentation
1. Presentation is chaotic, unstructured.
2. Semi-structured presentation – there are slides that are without connection to the scope of the presentation.
3. Minimal structuring – slides are mostly relevant.
4. Presentation is in line with the classical structure of a presentation (idea/research project) – number of slides is proportionate with the importance of chapters (introduction, reasoning/objectives/theoretical and methodological/research planning/potential or expected results).
5. Presentation is in line with the classical structure of a presentation/structuring of slides is adequate and reflects argumentation – includes elements.

Formulation of ideas
1. Very general ideas.
2. Specific ideas.
3. Clear ideas, specific, organized in a logical manner – keywords are properly marked.
4. Ideas organized based on the logic of the argumentation – provides references with other elements of the presentation.
5. Ideas organized based on the logic of the argumentation – provides references with other elements of the presentation to sustain interest and curiosity among audience.

There are images—graphs and tables used for structuring information/for greater impact of messages/for increasing the attractiveness of the presentation/design of slides/fonts to facilitate easy reading.

1. There are no images/graphs/tables.
2. Not adequate – understanding of relevance is difficult.
3. Adequate, yet the design does not facilitate easy identification of keywords.
4. Images and graphs are adequate – highlight on relevant text and keywords.
5. Adequate variation of images/graphs/ideas – keywords are properly highlighted.

Oral presentation

Verbal
1. Use of language – use of language is correct and adequate; ideas on slides are properly developed.
2. Simple readout of presentation.
3. Simple sentences based on slides.
4. Content of slides is developed to some extent.
5. Solid argumentation is constructed – there is coherence in the use of slides and the vocabulary and specific terminology are properly employed.
6. Solid argumentation – harmonious and coherent discourse. The language is used coherently, with nuances and expressive employment of words which consolidates attention from the audience, use of verbal expressions which highlight the main ideas of the presentation.

Verbal interaction with audience
1. Emphasis on conveying the content of slides without explicit interaction with the audience.
2. Emphasis on conveying the content of slides with minimal interaction with the audience.
3. Emphasis on conveying the content of slides with non-verbal interaction with the audience.
4. Emphasis on convincing the audience – dynamic interaction, both verbal and non-verbal, with the audience.
5. Emphasis on pulling the audience into the 'story' – the audience becomes an important part of the presentation. There is reference to experience and expectations of the audience. There are messages that motivate and create dynamics within the audience.

Q&A – ways of addressing questions from the audience
1. Answers are vague, not to the point.
2. Answers are general, yet structured.

(*Contd*)

Appendix 2. (*Contd*)

3. Answers are to the point – there is structuring and direction.
4. Answers are structured and specific with proper argumentation – creates connections with elements from the presentation.
5. Answers are specific and structured, with proper argumentation – there is connection to the elements in the presentation and to possible developments that stem from the question.

Paraverbal

1. Tone of voice, rhythm, voice modulation, use of emphasis, use of pauses.
2. Without modulation/flat tone/challenges in emphasizing.
3. Tone of voice adequate for a presentation – there are no pauses and no use of emphasis.
4. Adequate tone for an oral presentation – there is use of emphasis and pauses.
5. Tone is varied in dialogue/monologue/debate – adequate modulation of voice to highlight the main ideas.
6. Tone is varied with adequate modulation – proper use of emphasis and variations to highlight the main parts of the presentation.

Nonverbal

Body posture, body language, face mimics, body dynamics during presentation

1. Rigid body posture – body tension.
2. Rigid body posture – orientation towards the video-projector not towards the audience.
3. Dynamics during the presentation which highlight the need for interaction/conveying a message to the audience.
4. Dynamic posture – body and hands indicate dynamic interaction with the audience. There is non-verbal action to mark key moments during the presentation.
5. Continuous dynamic body posture indicates permanent desire to engage with the audience – interaction is actively looked for.

Time management

Time structuring for presentation and for questions/discussions

1. Does not respect the time allocated for the presentation – does not finish on time. Some slides are not presented.
2. Time is not allocated properly based on number and content of slides.
3. Time is factored in correctly, but there is not enough balance between individual times allocated per slide (detailed versus superficial presentation).
4. Time is allocated adequately – there is some degree of balance between individual times allocated per slide.
5. Time is allocated adequately – there is balance throughout the presentation. There is time allocated for Q&A/discussion

outcome. The initiative to develop AW courses in Romania is the result of the innovative behaviour of language teachers and trainers at the university level, and their awareness towards the requested competencies of a future researcher and of strategic decisions, such as those to increase the visibility of research results at the international level or develop highly qualified researchers. Developing and offering academic writing courses at the university level in Romania is a commitment that has to be based on acknowledged development directions and values. This commitment should be ideally doubled by a critical mass of Ph D coordinators and researchers that are continuously looking for ways to improve their academic writing skills in English.

The institutional commitment towards delivering English assistance programme courses, especially academic writing courses should be based on an initial mapping exercise of the needs of the target group and should fulfil those needs.

The use of different methods in analysing the learners' needs is a gain for the training programme due to enrichment of the general/specific image of the group and learning environment. The involvement of learners in designing their own learning process contributes to their increased commitment towards the whole process, and more responsibility at the individual level towards the learning outcomes.

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