

Review

of the academic output in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at New Bulgarian University

Author of dissertation: Fjolla Kallaba, PhD candidate at the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, New Bulgarian University, in the professional field 2.1. “Philology,”

Dissertation title: *Kosovo Students’ Academic Writing Skills in English – Challenges and Solutions*

Reviewer: prof. Diana Yankova, DLitt., Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, New Bulgarian University

Brief information about the applicant: Fjolla Kallaba is a PhD candidate in General and Comparative Linguistics at New Bulgarian University, Sofia, with research interests in academic writing, applied linguistics, and teaching English as a foreign language. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in English Language and Literature (2015) and a Master’s degree in Professional Translation and Interpreting (2018) from the University of “Hasan Prishtina,” Kosovo. Her professional profile also includes certification as a Pearson (PTE) examiner, as well as active participation in academic conferences and publications in international scholarly journals.

She has extensive teaching experience as a university lecturer and instructor in Academic English, writing, public speaking, and Business English in various educational institutions in Kosovo, including RIT Kosovo (A.U.K) and other universities and training centres. Her work includes curriculum development, preparing students for international language exams (TOEFL, IELTS), and participation in educational projects supported by international organizations. Alongside her teaching, she has developed experience as a translator and researcher, focusing on improving students’ academic writing competence in multicultural and multilingual environments.

Publications on the topic of the thesis: The publication record related to the dissertation demonstrates consistency and thematic coherence with the research problem. The article

Grammatical Error Analysis in Academic Essays: A Comprehensive Study of University Students in Kosovo (2025) presents an in-depth analysis of grammatical errors in academic essays written by Kosovo students, applying a systematic approach to their identification and classification. The study contributes to a better understanding of linguistic difficulties in the context of English as a foreign language and identifies areas requiring pedagogical intervention. The earlier publication *Kosovo Students' Academic Writing Skills in English: Challenges and Solutions* (2023) examines more broadly the challenges students face in academic writing, combining theoretical analysis with practical recommendations, thus laying the groundwork for subsequent empirical research.

In addition, the article *Examining Lecturers' Insights: Resolving Challenges and Implementing Strategies for Improving Academic Writing Proficiency Among Kosovo Students* (2024) focuses on lecturers' perspectives, exploring their observations regarding academic writing difficulties and effective strategies for overcoming them. This contribution broadens the research perspective by incorporating both learners and instructors. Taken together, the three publications reflect the main stages of the dissertation research - from identifying challenges, through empirical error analysis, to proposing practical solutions - and confirm the scientific relevance and dissemination of the results in reputable academic outlets.

The summary accurately reflects the structure and content of the dissertation.

Relevance of the dissertation: The dissertation by Fjolla Kallaba comprises 156 pages, six chapters, a bibliography, and four appendices. The work is logically structured and covers the main stages of a comprehensive scientific study. Chapter One (Introduction) outlines the relevance, aims, objectives, and research questions, as well as the scope of the study. Chapter Two provides a thorough review of the literature, addressing the development of academic writing, the specifics of the essay genre, difficulties in writing in English as a foreign language, as well as the theoretical foundations of error analysis and teaching approaches. This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter Three is devoted to methodology, describing the use of a mixed-methods approach, including analysis of student essays and survey research among students and lecturers. Chapter Four presents and analyzes the results, identifying the main types of errors and discussing difficulties in academic writing. The concluding chapters summarize the findings, provide

recommendations for improving academic writing instruction, and outline the study's limitations. The structure is clear, well-organized, and aligned with the research objectives.

The relevance of the dissertation is determined by the growing role of English as a global academic standard and the need for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds to develop a high level of academic writing competence. In the context of the internationalization of higher education and increased student mobility, the ability to write academic texts in English is a key factor for academic and professional success. The study of the difficulties faced by Kosovo students in writing academic essays is particularly significant, as it reveals specific linguistic, cognitive, and methodological deficiencies that remain underexplored in the regional context. Furthermore, the rapid development of digital technologies and the integration of artificial intelligence into education present new challenges and opportunities for teaching academic writing. In this sense, the dissertation contributes to the advancement of applied linguistics and teaching methodology by offering practical strategies for improving students' writing skills.

Familiarity with the research problem and literature review: The dissertation demonstrates strong familiarity with the research problem, based on a comprehensive and systematic review of the relevant literature in academic writing, applied linguistics, and English as a foreign language (EFL). Both classical and contemporary studies are examined, addressing the nature of academic writing, its cognitive and social dimensions, and the specifics of essay writing. Particular attention is given to studies on students' difficulties in writing in English, including grammatical, structural, and lexical errors, as well as factors such as native language interference, insufficient academic literacy, and lack of effective writing strategies.

The review also includes research on Error Analysis as a methodological approach, as well as pedagogical models for teaching writing—product-oriented, process-oriented, and genre-based approaches. Additionally, contemporary trends involving digital technologies and artificial intelligence tools are discussed, highlighting both their potential benefits and associated risks. Through critical analysis and synthesis, the dissertation demonstrates a high level of scholarly awareness and clearly positions the study within the current academic discourse.

Alignment between aims, objectives, and methodology: The alignment between the research aims, objectives, and methodology is well justified and logically consistent. The main objective—to identify and analyze difficulties in academic writing in English among Kosovo

students and propose effective strategies—corresponds directly to the research questions and tasks. The use of a mixed-methods approach is appropriate, allowing both in-depth qualitative analysis of student writing and quantitative data collection through surveys.

The qualitative component, based on detailed analysis of written texts, enables identification and classification of various types of errors, while the quantitative component provides broader generalization of findings by incorporating both student and lecturer perspectives. The methodology ensures reliability, validity, and comprehensiveness of the results. It can be confidently stated that the research objectives have been successfully achieved.

Contributions of the dissertation: The contributions of the dissertation are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study enhances understanding of academic writing among Kosovo students by systematizing and analyzing key types of errors using established Error Analysis models. The developed classification adapts existing frameworks to a relatively underexplored sociolinguistic context.

From an applied perspective, the dissertation proposes concrete pedagogical strategies and methodological guidelines for improving academic writing. These include integrating modern teaching approaches (process, genre-based, and hybrid models) and effectively using digital and AI tools. The use of a mixed-methods approach itself also represents a methodological contribution.

The findings have practical value for curriculum development, academic writing courses, and teaching materials in Kosovo and similar contexts, offering applicable solutions for educational practice.

Critical remarks: Despite its merits, several points could be improved. The literature review is sometimes more descriptive than analytical, lacking deeper critical engagement and clearer positioning of the author's contribution. The research sample is limited to certain universities in Kosovo, which may affect generalizability. The methodology could be enriched with additional qualitative tools such as interviews or observations. The discussion of artificial intelligence remains somewhat general and could benefit from empirical data. Some recommendations are also rather broad and could be further specified through practical models or teaching materials.

These remarks aim to support further development and do not diminish the value of the work.

Conclusion: All critical remarks are intended to improve the quality of the analysis and presentation and do not detract from the significant effort and results achieved. The dissertation meets all requirements for a scholarly work and represents a substantial, theoretically and practically significant contribution in accordance with Article 27 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Academic Staff Development Act. I confidently give a positive evaluation of Fjolla Kallaba's dissertation and recommend that she be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor."

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