

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Dafina Yanorova Kostadinova, PhD,
South-West University “Neofit Rilski”,

Professional field

2.1 Philology, General and Comparative Linguistics (English Language),
for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy” in professional
field 2.1 Philology, scientific field of Germanic Languages (English Language) to PhD
student Fjolla Kallaba for her PhD Thesis

„Kosovo Students’ Academic Writing Skills in English – Challenges and Solutions“

Academic Advisor: Prof Irena Vassileva, Dr phil habil

The opinion was compiled pursuant to Ordinance No. 3-PK-155/01.04.2026 of the Rector of the New Bulgarian University Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Plamen Doinov and on a decision of the academic committee.

The dissertation and accompanying materials submitted by Fjolla Kallaba: three publications, participation in two international scientific conferences, and a CV outlining her academic background and focused professional development in the fields of English language teaching, academic English, simultaneous and written translation, as well as her teaching experience at various institutions in Kosovo, including the college and university in Prishtina meet all the national minimum requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the Republic of Bulgaria.

1. Significance of the Research Problem

The PhD thesis is devoted to a fundamental issue in the field of applied linguistics and English as a FLT: the development of students’ academic writing skills in English. This problem is relevant not only to Kosovo, but to any country where English is taught as a foreign language. In the context of globalization and the status quo of English as lingua franca and the primary tool of academic communication, research of this kind that focuses on the challenges of academic writing has significant academic and practical value.

The study investigates the written production of students from Kosovo, a relatively under-researched group, which enhances the originality of the research and creates opportunities for future studies in this area, not only by Fjolla Kallaba. The dissertation is interdisciplinary; it also examines the role and application of artificial intelligence in teaching academic writing skills and implementing AI tools in writing texts in academic English.

2. Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study is clearly formulated and logically follows from the research problem. Five specific research questions are defined, focusing on:

- identifying difficulties in academic writing;
- analyzing the types of errors found in students' essays;
- examining the strategies students employ to improve effectiveness and avoid errors;
- incorporating lecturers' perspectives, which demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of the study and the author's strong professional engagement.

These research questions are relevant, well-structured, and appropriately addressed in the dissertation.

3. Correspondence Between Methodology and Research Objectives

A mixed-methods approach has been employed, which is fully appropriate to the aims and the multifaceted nature of the study:

- qualitative analysis of 50 student essays;
- quantitative analysis through surveys involving 400 students and 40 lecturers.

The strengths of this methodological choice include a clear organization and structuring of the research stages, as well as a well-justified selection of established methods. The ratio of 1:10 (lecturers to students) in the survey provides a balanced perspective, despite the author's own critical remark regarding the limited number of participants.

Future research could expand the sample size and place greater emphasis on the validity and reliability of both the research instruments and the results, as well as their applicability in theory and practice.

4. Scientific and Applied Contributions of the PhD Thesis

The dissertation proves its originality through its multi- and interdisciplinary approach to the research problem at both global and local levels. The work is well-structured and logically coherent, including all essential components of a dissertation:

- introduction with clearly defined motivation, research questions, and objectives;
- theoretical framework demonstrating in-depth literature overview;
- methodology and research instruments;
- results and analysis;
- conclusion, contributions, and limitations of the study.

5. Evaluation of Publications Related to the PhD Thesis

The conference presentations delivered by Fjolla Kallaba in Sofia (2023) and Vienna (2024), as well as the three published articles (2023, 2024, and 2025), are directly related to the dissertation topic. They demonstrate a gradual and consistent focus on the key issues addressed in the dissertation research.

6. Opinions, Recommendations, and Critical Remarks

The dissertation presented by PhD student Fjolla Kallaba possesses the essential characteristics of an original scientific work. It is well-developed within its theoretical framework and includes the necessary qualitative and quantitative research and analysis. The approach to the topic and the conclusions drawn from the study are authentic.

The contributions of the dissertation are applicable in various areas of applied linguistics and the teaching of English and academic writing, not only in Kosovo.

A critical remark may be made regarding the tendency toward descriptiveness at the expense of deeper critical analysis in parts of the theoretical review. A more thorough comparison between different theoretical approaches could strengthen the study; however, this is typical for early-stage PhD research and cannot be considered as grave disadvantage.

The limitation of the study, already acknowledged by the author, does not diminish the value of the results, which are presented systematically and in detail. Particularly valuable are:

- the quantitative analysis of errors (a total of 894);
- their classification;
- and their illustration through concrete examples from student texts.

Scientific and applied contributions include:

- systematization of typical errors among EFL students in Kosovo;
- provision of empirical data;
- integration of theory and practice;
- proposals for improving academic writing instruction;
- inclusion of a contemporary dimension—the role of AI in teaching and academic writing.

The submitted abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation.

7. Conclusion

In view of the above considerations regarding the scientific value, contributions, and originality of the dissertation by Fjolla Kallaba, I firmly state that both the PhD thesis and the accompanying materials fully comply with the national minimum requirements and the provisions of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

As a member of the scientific jury, I confidently give my positive evaluation of the dissertation and vote in favor of awarding Fjolla Kallaba the educational and scientific degree Doctor.

2 May 2026

Signed:

(Assoc. Prof. Dafina Kostadinova, PhD)