

English for Academic Publishing in the Saudi Context: A Review of Emerging Challenges, Evolving Opportunities, and Transformative Support Mechanisms for Postgraduate Researchers

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Abstract

Academic English for Publication Purposes (AEPP) remains a critical challenge for many Saudi postgraduate learners due to various problems arising from linguistic, academic literacies, mentorship, and technological aspects. Linguistic and cultural constraints may pose barriers to non-native English-speaking researchers in meeting the requirements of high-impact journals. Moreover, conducting peer reviews would be challenging for such people, as they would lack access to mentorship or global connections in the research field. Collectively, these factors hinder their publication prospects, confidence in academia, and participation in international research. The review article aims to examine recent empirical and theoretical research on the difficulties and opportunities for academic publishing in English-medium universities in Saudi Arabia. Drawing on the theories of Academic Literacies and ERPP, this review highlights the significance of creating an organized, coherent framework. Rather than fragmented workshops, postgraduate learners get continuous guidance and support in writing, writing centers, mentoring, and the use of AI tools. This review introduces a contextualized approach to English for academic purposes that aligns with Saudi Vision 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote equitable participation and sustainable engagement in global knowledge production.

Keywords: English for Academic Publishing, Saudi postgraduate students, Academic Literacies, institutional resources, mentoring, AI writing technologies, international publishing

1. Introduction

In the contemporary knowledge economy, academic publishing outputs serve as an effective benchmark for assessing the performance of scholars, institutions, and even countries in terms of productivity and research competitiveness (Mazur et al., 2025). The predominance of English as the medium of academic communication creates barriers to participation in international academic discourse due to language proficiency (Habibie & Hultgren, 2022; Verma, 2023). While globalization in higher education has opened more avenues for sharing global knowledge, it has also presented additional language and rhetorical obstacles for non-English-speaking academics, especially those who are still developing their academic identities (Karlsson & Karlsson, 2021; Yousefi & Devi, 2021). Publication in peer-reviewed international journals has become one of the most important criteria for graduate students; it is also closely linked to graduation, professional development, research funding, and prestige (Bouhey, 2023). Despite these requirements, many studies indicate ongoing problems that NNEST graduate students face in meeting the requirements of English-language journals (Bazar et al., 2023; Y. Zhang et al., 2025). These challenges are not limited to grammatical accuracy. Students frequently struggle to adhere to genre expectations, construct convincing arguments, articulate their position in academic discourse, adopt a discipline-appropriate academic tone, and navigate peer review successfully (Farooqui & Elashhab, 2025; Ismail, 2025). Consequently, even competent postgraduate scholars confront rejection, extensive revisions, or, ultimately, marginalization from the global publication arena (Gatwiri et al., 2025).

Within this global context, Saudi Arabia deserves greater attention, as it remains relatively underexplored in English-language academic publishing literature, particularly regarding the experiences of postgraduate students, the effectiveness of institutional support systems, and the emerging role of AI-assisted writing tools in publication success. With the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030, the country has gradually emphasized higher research standards, international collaboration, and greater visibility of Saudi research and scholarship globally (Al-Jamimi et al., 2023). Universities are now assessed on the basis of the number of publications, the citation frequency of these publications, and their presence in international databases such as Scopus and Web of Science (Ghani et al., 2022). With Saudi universities placing greater emphasis on international research visibility, graduate students face increased pressure to publish their work in English-language journals. Some students report difficulties with academic writing and international publication practices, which can negatively affect publication outcomes (Alhamami, 2023; Hendy et al., 2024). Empirical research conducted in Saudi Arabia indicates that postgraduate students face distinct challenges in their academic writing due to inadequate undergraduate preparation, insufficient knowledge of publication requirements abroad, and limited writing support (Alawad, 2024; Ankawi, 2023). The challenges students

encounter stem from differences in the rhetorical cultures associated with Arabic and English academic conventions, including arguments, authors' positioning, and literary criticism (AlQbailat et al., 2025; Eid & Mutahar, 2025). Consequently, many postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia have to turn to personal, social, or editing assistance at the last minute (Alghamdi & Plunkett, 2022). To explain the complexity of this connection, Figure 1 highlights the essential barriers, support mechanisms, and publishing outcomes of English-for-Academic-Publishing among Saudi postgraduate students, as well as their associations with local and international policy agendas.

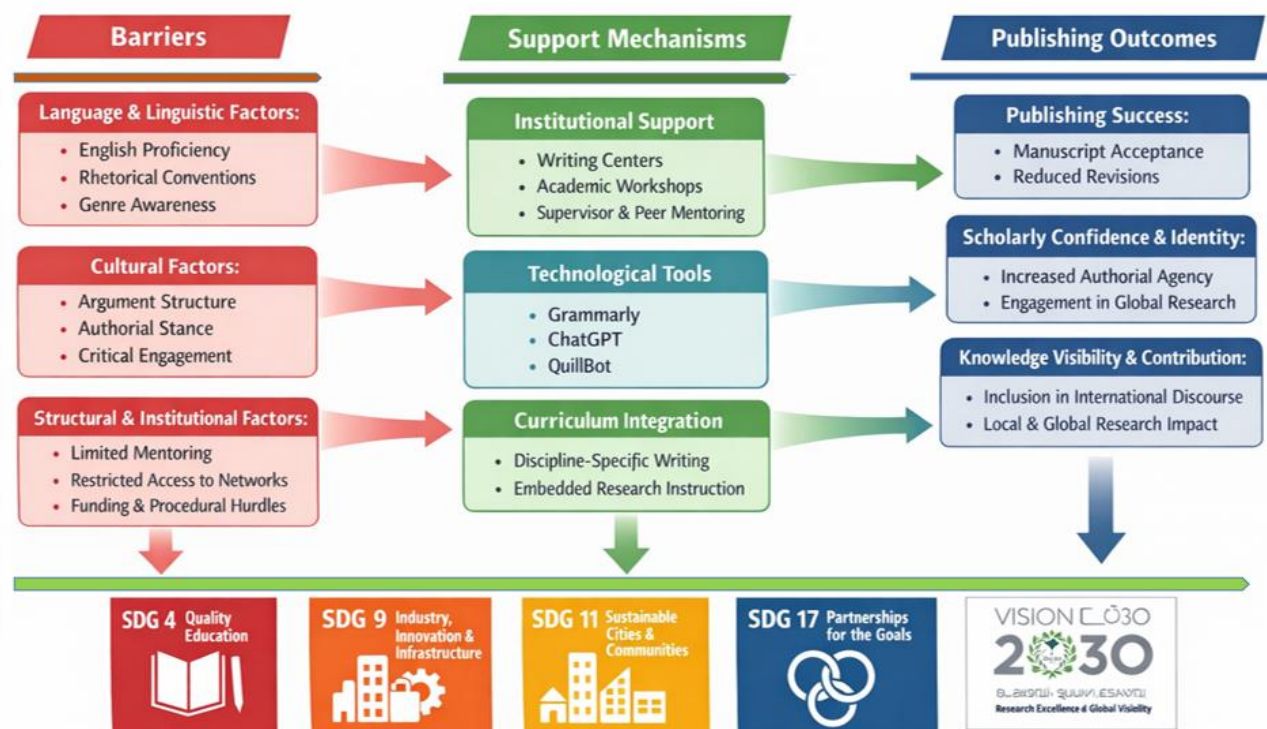


Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing the barriers, support structures, and outcomes of English for Academic Publishing among Saudi postgraduate students and in relation to national and global policy agendas (SDGs 4, 9, 11, 17, and Vision 2030). Designed by Bio render

In response to these challenges, a number of support mechanisms are now readily available at Saudi Arabian universities, which include writing centers, academic writing workshops, mentoring programs, and editorial or translation services (Pratiwi, Riwanda, et al., 2025). Although these practices reflect a growing institutional awareness of the challenges posed by language barriers, current evidence indicates that they are often fragmented, unevenly distributed across institutions, and insufficiently integrated into postgraduate provision (Rozner, 2023). In addition, few studies have empirically examined whether these strategies contribute to tangible publishing outcomes among postgraduate students, such as increased acceptance rates, shorter revision times, and greater publication self-efficacy (H. Zhang et al., 2025). Currently, AI-based writing tools such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and QuillBot have emerged as additional writing support for NNES writers (Raheem et al., 2023). Research indicates that these tools can help improve the precision and fluency of writing and drafting (Bahari, 2025; D. Zhao, 2025). However, there are some reservations scholars should consider regarding the excessive use of these AI tools, emphasizing ethical considerations, critical thinking, and the avoidance of superficial academic discourse (Bhatti, 2025; Pratiwi, Suherman, et al., 2025). In the Saudi context, empirical research on the intersection of AI tools and support systems for postgraduate publishing practices remains limited.

This review article synthesizes interdisciplinary research from applied linguistics, higher education, and academic publishing to identify the hindrances and facilitators to the use of English for academic publication among Saudi postgraduate students. It provides an analysis of global best practices in the context of the literature on English-language proficiency, institutional mechanisms for support, and the most up-to-date technology to provide a framework for academic publishing. By situating these issues within the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, this review aims to provide a scalable, evidence-based framework for English for Academic Publishing that supports linguistic empowerment, research visibility, and sustainable participation in global research. In advancing a language-centered and policy-aligned perspective, this review aims to contribute to the ongoing debates on issues concerning equity in global knowledge production and aims to provide useful information to academics, supervisors, and policymakers in advancing the position of Saudi Arabia in global academia while advancing international goals in inclusive education, innovation, and reducing inequalities.

2. Rationale of Current Review

The emerging patterns in international research visibility and global academic engagement have greatly impacted higher education systems worldwide, and English-language academic publishing has become a key feature of academic engagement and career growth (Bagayawa et al., 2024; Shen et al., 2022). For postgraduate students in non-English-dominant contexts, especially in Saudi Arabia, the ability to publish research has become a critical factor in promoting and disseminating research, securing institutional recognition, and meeting national research priorities outlined in Saudi Vision 2030. Despite the increasing opportunities for research productivity in Saudi higher education institutes, to publish research findings, publishing research in English has become a major challenge for Saudi postgraduate students, especially in relation to disciplinary discourse, academic writing norms, and international publication standards (Lund et al., 2023; Shen & Jiang, 2023).

Although academic writing and support mechanisms have gained increasing attention and awareness in the realm of higher education, it has been observed that the existing body of research has created little integrated knowledge regarding the effect of English language proficiency, the facilities available in institutional support mechanisms, and the evolving technology to assist students in publishing their academic works in the context of Saudi Arabia. The review aims to assess global best practices in academic publishing through systematic evaluation and to develop, within the context of Saudi Arabia, a framework to improve students' academic publishing skills without compromising the originality of academic writing.

The research is based on the following research questions:

1. How does the level of English proficiency influence the ability of Saudi postgraduate students to interact with international journals, the peer review process, and the global research community?
2. How do institutional support structures and mentoring contribute to improving the academic publication experience of the postgraduate students?
3. How do linguistic and cultural constraints affect the success of academic publications by the students, as well as their involvement in the international academic discourse?

3. Methodology

Review design

The review adopted a systematic literature review approach to synthesize evidence on English for Academic Publishing (EAP) and the structures available to non-native English-speaking (NNES) postgraduate students regarding the elements of success in publication, identity, and participation in international journal publications. The systematic literature review adopted the PRISMA criteria to ensure rigor, transparency, and replicability of the review process.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across three academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), and Google Scholar. The search strategy was conducted between October and January 2025-2026, and targeted studies were published between 2017 and 2026 to gather recent developments in English academic writing, academic publishing support, and AI-assisted writing technologies. The search study combined keywords and Boolean operators that were incorporated, including "English for Academic Publishing", "ERPP", "Saudi postgraduate students", "academic writing challenges", "AI writing tools", "mentoring in academic publishing", "scholarly publishing", "publication barriers" nonnative English scholars", etc. Additional manual searches of reference lists were conducted to identify relevant studies not retrieved in the database search.

Eligibility criteria

Studies were selected only if they:

1. Were published in peer-reviewed journals
2. Main focus on academic publishing, academic writing, English for Research Publication Purposes, Publication practices, or related to keywords.
3. Focused on postgraduate students, doctoral students, NNES researchers or scholars, early career researchers, and academic writers
4. Published empirical findings or provided a comprehensive review of evidence.

Studies were excluded if they:

1. Were published before 2015.
2. Were editorials, book reviews, dissertations, or opinion papers.
3. Were not directly related to keywords like academic publishing
4. Lacked sufficient methodological information.
5. Were published before 2015.

Selection procedure

The selection of the article involved four subsequent stages:

1. Identification: In total, 309 articles have been identified through the chosen databases by applying the predefined keywords.
2. Screening: Following the exclusion of 49 duplicates, 260 papers were left to be filtered using their titles and abstracts. This phase resulted in the elimination of 135 studies, which were unrelated to the research question.
3. Eligibility: Full-text articles among 125 studies were assessed in regard to their relevance to English for Academic Publishing, institutional support, mentoring, and publication outcomes. In this step, 16 articles were excluded for irrelevance, obsolete results, or weak methodology.
4. Inclusion: A total of 109 articles were included in the review due to adherence to the criteria of inclusion and were chosen for further analysis with a special focus on barriers, enablers, and strategies to improve publication success of postgraduate students. This stage is depicted by the PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 2).

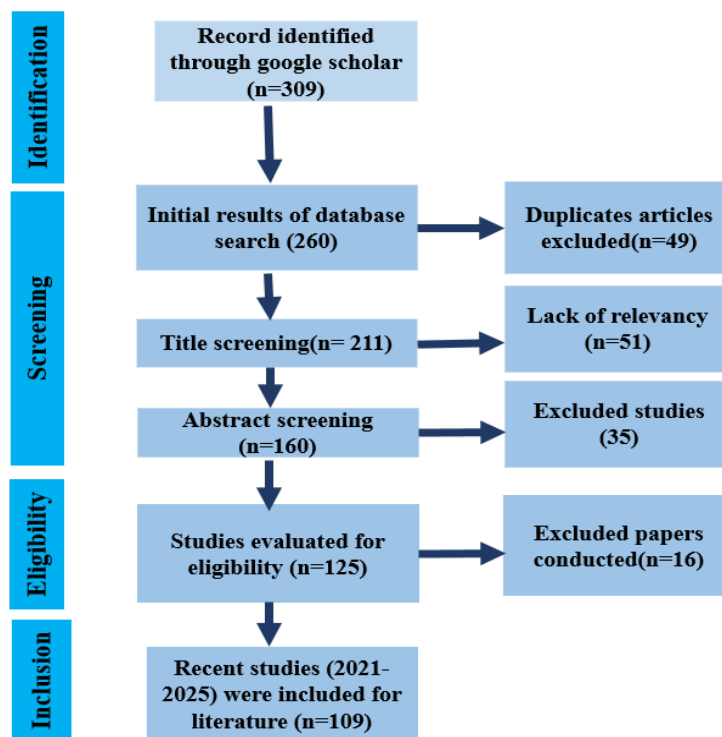


Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram

In the screening process, duplicates and irrelevant papers were eliminated based on their title and abstracts. In the eligibility process, the full texts of the 125 remaining papers were evaluated for relevance to English for Academic Publishing, institutional support, mentoring, and publications. The papers that failed to address the research questions of this systematic review, contained insufficient methodological information, were not peer reviewed, or had been published before 2020, unless they represented some seminal work related to the subject, were excluded. As a result, 16 articles were excluded, while 109 studies met the inclusion criteria. Finally, during the inclusion stage, 109 relevant and high-quality papers were included in the review.

Quality Appraisal

The methodological quality of selected empirical studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, 2018). Studies were evaluated for the clarity of objectives, appropriateness of design, sampling rigor, data collection quality, and validity of conclusions. Only studies demonstrating moderate to high methodological quality were retained for synthesis. The included review articles were evaluated based on their scope, methodological transparency, and relevance to the review objectives.

Data collection

A standardized data extraction form was developed and used to systematically gather key information from the selected studies, such as: Study design and methodology of research, sample population and academic settings, institutional support mechanisms (such as writing centers, workshops, mentoring), use of AI tools or technological interventions, linguistic, cultural, and structural barriers to publishing, and outcomes such as quality of manuscript, publication success rates, and scholarly confidence. Data extraction was conducted by the author in accordance with the predefined extraction criteria. Data were organized in tables to identify common themes, trends, and gaps in the literature. Both qualitative and quantitative insights were recorded to support thematic synthesis.

Data Analysis

Following PRISMA guidelines, the final set of 109 studies underwent narrative and thematic synthesis. A meta-analysis was not possible due to the diversity of study designs and outcomes. Instead, extracted data were systematically coded and organized by using thematic analysis. Initially, keywords from each study were carefully reviewed and assigned preliminary codes for institutional support, barriers to academic publishing, and scholarly identity. Similar codes in studies were grouped into the following major categories: institutional support systems and mentoring practices; linguistic and cultural barriers to international publishing; technological tools and AI-assisted writing; and scholarly identity and engagement with global research communities. This process resulted in major themes.

To enhance analytical rigor, these themes were continuously reviewed and refined to accurately reflect patterns, contradictions, and gaps in the literature. Other methodological characteristics of the selected studies, such as research design, sample population, and context, were also examined to assess the strength and applicability of the evidence. The critical analysis helped in understanding how the results were analyzed using thematic analysis, in relation to patterns, methodological differences, and similarities and differences among studies on English for Academic Publishing among NNES postgraduate students.

4. Findings

English Language Proficiency and International Publishing

The dominance of English as a lingua franca in academic publishing has many implications for NNES scholars. However, on further observation, one can conclude that these issues go beyond mere grammatical errors. Based on the evidence from studies analyzed in this literature review, one can conclude that NNES scholars and researchers encounter persistent problems when publishing in high-impact journals. In terms of institutions and bibliometrics, the results show that researchers who speak languages other than English are less likely to publish successfully in top-ranked international journals, as indicated by higher rejection rates and longer time to revision (Darragh et al., 2024; Strauss & Manalo, 2023). Similarly, other studies have shown that language issues, disciplinary discourse, and academic writing conventions pose significant barriers to NNES researchers' success in publishing (Phyo et al., 2025; Y. Zhang et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies show that language and rhetoric have been major barriers to Saudi postgraduate students' international publishing.

The findings also reveal that English language proficiency serves as a mediating variable in the reviewers' textual accuracy and their critical engagement with expectations. Across the reviewed studies, research writing challenges faced by both student and faculty populations in national contexts such as Saudi Arabia are documented. A research study by Taye & Mengesha (2024) and Al Mahmud & Afzal Ur Rah Manu (2023) revealed that graduate students face significant problems in language, argument development, and the conventions of research genres in English, with implications for their preparedness to write and publish their research (Lin & Morrison, 2021). Within the Saudi context, the available evidence indicates that postgraduate students have encountered numerous challenges in academic publishing. These students often struggle to meet the linguistic and publication requirements of international English journals, largely due to a lack of familiarity with academic publication conventions and poor writing skills (Al-Nafjan & Alhawsawi, 2022; Elgamri et al., 2023). The findings reveal that the challenges identified in previous research on NNES are also present in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the local factors can also influence the preparation of Saudi postgraduate students for publication.

Another recurring finding across the reviewed studies is that publication challenges are shaped not only by students' language proficiency but also by broader disciplinary and institutional contexts. Studies conducted at English-medium universities found that the lack of writing support, poor mentoring, and limited experience with peer review also contributed to the unsuccessful publication of NNES scholars. (M. Li, 2024; Shamsi & Osam, 2022). Empirical research has demonstrated that such problems in writing are not merely confined to procedural difficulties or linguistic ones but are rather influenced by the requirements of academic literacy, including those of dealing with rhetorical complexity. Shamsi & Osam (2024) observed that problems faced by doctoral candidates include those arising from linguistic challenges, genre conventions, and a lack of publication assistance, which impact the candidate's ability to come up with a publishable paper. Collectively, the results indicate that linguistic problems should not be considered in isolation but rather as language challenges that depend on context and are influenced by the requirements of the discipline, the institutional support system, and the publishing process. Therefore, to enhance the publication outcomes, a holistic perspective should be adopted.

Academic Literacies and Scholarly Identity

The analysis of the reviewed literature revealed that the challenges of academic publishing are not limited to language competencies alone, but also involve issues of scholarly identity and disciplinary practices (Canagarajah, 2022). It highlighted the fact that the academic literacies approach to the topic recognizes writing not as linguistic surface features but as a meaningful activity within discipline-specific communities. Several studies have shown that NNES researchers struggle to meet disciplinary expectations, develop an authorial voice, and follow the rhetorical conventions of international journals (Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025; Mu, 2025).

The contradiction between the growing acceptance of multilingualism and the persistence of English as the dominant language in scientific publication is a recurring theme in the literature. This theoretical approach focuses on how the author manipulates language and genre through the power dynamics of academic publishing. One major contradiction in the field is the tension between multilingual inclusivity and English's dominant status as the medium of academic discourse.

The study conducted by Sultana, Hamid, and Roshid (2026) highlighted the growing relevance, given the increasing number of scholars

studying multilingual and plurilingual publication strategies, especially the problems writers encounter under the dominant English-language regime in academia. Recent empirical research by Schnell (2024) emphasizes the need to consider unique writing experiences in non-native environments, especially when English is used as an international language in academia. According to Schnell, the use of a foreign language in academia influences both the writing and peer-review processes. Collectively, these findings suggest that successful participation in international publishing depends not only on language proficiency but also on the ability to navigate disciplinary conventions, publication norms, and power relations.

The perspective of literacies also draws attention to the construction of scholarly identity. Studies of bilingual and multilingual researchers have shown that academic writing is closely tied to how one views oneself as belonging to the intersecting scholarly community (Canagarajah, 2024; Curry & Lillis, 2024). For example, a research study conducted on bilingual returnee academics showed that both English and the native language together contribute to the formation of the researcher's identity, which affects each other rhetorically in international academia (A. W. Li, 2024). The results of this study align with the constructivist approach to author identity, which holds that identity is formed not only through linguistic but also through discursive processes, institutional demands, and cultural background (L. Zhang & Wang, 2024). In addition, many studies in the field of academic literacies examine power dynamics in scholarly publishing and discuss which voices are amplified or suppressed (Martire, 2021). Research by Kuteeva (2023) on editor and reviewer discourses on manuscript evaluation shows that language assessment is more significant than the paper's scientific novelty. Thus, the structural aspect of literacies demonstrates that the legitimacy and visibility of scholars emerge from rules that transcend individual ability and encompass factors such as editing, peer review, and structural inequalities in academic discourse systems.

The connection between academic literacies and ideas about translanguaging, multilingual agency, and discipline identity can be seen in the larger body of multilingual writing research. (Zhu & Li, 2025). Nevertheless, the significance of this literature for scholarly writing is significant because it has been shown that plurilingual writers are not just moving their knowledge of writing but instead reshaping voice, audience consciousness, and epistemic position in response to the demands of publishing in different linguistic and cultural environments (Gagné et al., 2023). This synthesis further reveals a major gap in current research. Even though many studies have examined the linguistic, social, and structural aspects of academic publishing, few offer concrete methods for improving postgraduate students' academic literacy. This gap justifies the development of an integrated approach that comprises teaching academic writing skills, mentorship, institutional assistance, and proper use of writing technologies with AI assistance in Saudi Arabia.

Institutional Support Systems and Mentoring Practices

The synthesis of the reviewed studies demonstrates that institutional support structures have played a critical role in nurturing postgraduate learners' ability to leverage their language proficiency to engage with the global academic publication community. Across these studies in the ERPP domain, writing centers, academic writing classes, mentorship programs, and supervision support mechanisms have become increasingly important (Joseph Jeyaraj et al., 2022; H. Zhang et al., 2025). Such interventions are often thought to enhance not only linguistic proficiency but also more complex academic abilities, such as argumentation, knowledge of different genres, citation techniques, and interaction with peer-review practices (Almashour et al., 2025). However, most of the literature fails to adequately question whether the development of these skills constitutes "transferability," whether these processes involve institutional positionality, and how students and academics are privileged in particular contexts through these institutions.

Within the Saudi context, reviewed studies revealed that many universities have been establishing writing, research, and scientific writing centers as part of the nation's efforts to become more visible internationally as a research community (Alharbi & Albelihi, 2023). However, empirical evidence indicates that the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of such support mechanisms vary significantly across organizations (Barrot, 2024). Across the reviewed studies, empirical findings by Trinidad, Decano, and Cuizon (2025) indicate a lack of, or inconsistent access to, writing support services for postgraduates, with writing service provision remaining peripheral rather than integral to the postgraduate curriculum. This systemic problem highlights an important yet unaddressed point in ERPP studies: the presumption that access to services ensures competence-building. In fact, access does not ensure use, nor does use ensure transformation if support is not incorporated into the epistemological and evaluative structures of disciplines. Thus, institutional support must be recognized not only as something provided but also as part of the governance of postgraduate writing development.

Mentoring practices are another consistent theme across the reviewed studies, and it's a supervision, guidance, and peer mentoring have consistently emerged as crucial for producing publication-worthy manuscripts. (de Souza & Gillett, 2025; J. Zhao & Zheng, 2025). Effective mentoring can offer postgraduate students "tacit knowledge" about disciplines, such as "how to frame their research contribution," "how to work with reviewer comments," "which journal is the best fit," and "how to match their manuscript with the journal's expectations." (Casanave & Li, 2021; Habibie & Hyland, 2023). Mentoring also enables students to develop their scholarly identities through iterative feedback and dialogic interaction (Atenas et al., 2023; Diekman et al., 2025). In addition, despite the acknowledged importance of mentoring, research in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries indicates that mentoring practices are often informal, inconsistent, and highly dependent on the individual supervisor (Alkhatnai, 2023; Alsaadi, 2025). This can be a considerable burden, and the extent to which supervisors can offer detailed feedback to postgraduate writers can be limited. (Bahtilla, 2024; Tuck, 2025). In the absence of structured mentoring frameworks, many students rely on self-directed learning strategies, commercial language editing services, or informal peer networks to compensate for gaps in institutional support (Mokoena & van Tonder, 2024). However, such practices may not necessarily help students engage more critically with genre conventions (Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025; R. Li, 2025). This can be depicted by Figure 3.

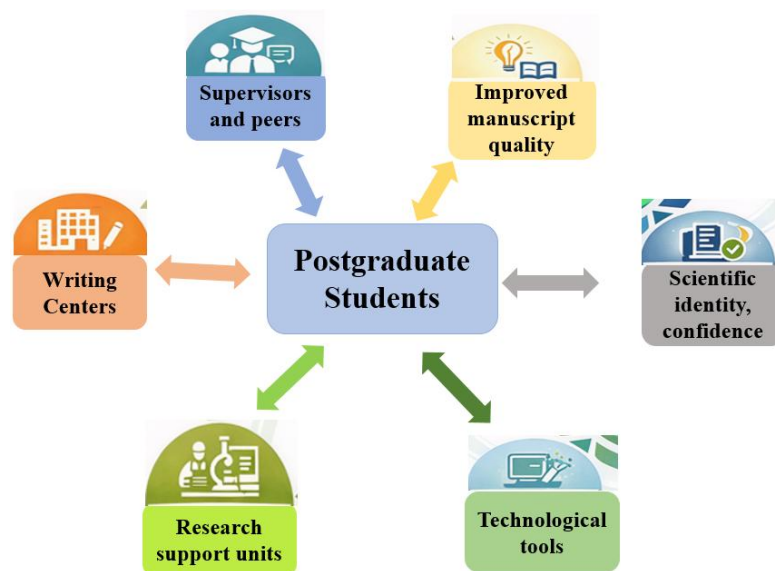


Figure 3. Conceptual diagram illustrating the central role of the postgraduate student and the surrounding institutional support and mentoring mechanisms that contribute to publishing competence, scholarly identity, and research visibility.

Recent studies by Liang & Ahn (2025) and Mutua (2025) further argue that these inequities in mentoring and institutional support have a particularly strong impact on non-native English-speaking postgraduate students, reflecting the wider dynamics of linguistic and epistemological inequality in global knowledge production. From an academic literacies perspective, the lack of sustained, integrated support means that students are unable to access the tacit norms and power structures of international publishing. (Allehaby, 2025). Overall, the synthesis finds that effective participation in international academic publishing requires institutional support systems that go beyond workshops or language assistance alone. Three key elements identified as indispensable across all reviews are integrated writing assistance, mentoring, and discipline-specific tutoring for postgraduate students.

AI-Based Writing Tools in Academic Publishing

The emergence of AI technology, particularly the development of large language models and automated writing assistance tools such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and QuillBot, has been an essential factor in revolutionizing academic writing (Anis & Khalid, 2024; Raheem et al., 2023). Whereas in the reviewed studies, these tools were traditionally viewed as impartial aids to production, current research sees them as mediators whose use affects the processes of knowledge-making and evaluation within academic spaces (Giglio & Costa, 2023; J. Li et al., 2024). For non-native English-speaking (NNES) scholars, there is an assumption that AI serves as a remedial tool that helps to mitigate the linguistic disadvantages they face within the dominant English-language publication structure. Nevertheless, this perception may be somewhat misleading, as it fails to examine how AI reinforces a standardized form of scholarly language.

A growing body of empirical research by Tang et al. (2024) and Khalifa & Albadawy (2024) suggests that these tools can play an important role in reducing surface-level linguistic errors in writing, making text clearer and assisting in the drafting process, thus reducing linguistic barriers to academic publishing for NNES researchers. From the perspective of English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP), these tools can serve as a scaffold to help the writer meet the minimum linguistic requirements for English-medium publications.

Recent large-scale analyses by Prakash et al. (2025) demonstrate that the use of AI writing tools reduces productivity gaps between researchers who speak English as their first language and those who do not by encouraging the adoption of dominant writing styles. This development has sparked debates over the use of AI tools to combat linguistic inequality in global knowledge production, particularly in contexts with limited access to writing resources or expert mentoring (Ghimire, 2025). At the same time, it raises considerable concerns about overuse, ethical transparency, and the loss of critical academic writing skills (Miao et al., 2023). According to a study by Hu et al. (2024), scholars are concerned that AI writing can lead to a focus on fluency, correctness, rhetorical complexity, disciplinary thinking, and epistemic stances, which are critical for effective scholarly communication. The development poses an ethical problem that is increasingly arising regarding the authors' originality and transparency, for which the journal and the publisher have set very strict rules.

In the specific context of higher education in Saudi Arabia, no empirical evidence on the ethical application of AI writing software in postgraduate research education. Although exploratory and anecdotal studies by Ogalo & Mtenzi (2025) and Qadhi et al. (2024) demonstrate a rising trend among postgraduate students in the use of AI tools, there is no indication of systematic strategies to ensure that academic integrity and publishing standards remain unaffected. It underscores the need for policies and pedagogy to acknowledge AI tools as assistive devices rather than replacements for learning tools.

From an academic literacies perspective, AI-based writing technologies should not be considered technology-mediated resources but, instead, as mediating technologies that influence how writers acquire and internalize disciplinary norms, construct themselves as scholars, and engage with international scholarly networks (Zakirova & Bedeker, 2025). The reviewed studies indicate that the use of AI writing technologies should not be approached as a technology-neutral aid but rather as transformative actors that influence both the mitigation and reproduction of inequality in academic scholarship. The findings reveal that AI-powered writing aids such as ChatGPT and Grammarly can help non-native English-speaking scholars enhance linguistic accuracy, efficiency, and fluency in their writing. On the other hand, multiple articles highlight issues related to overreliance on these tools, including their potential influence on critical thinking skills, students' integrity, authorship, and the individuality of the scholar's writing voice. In general, the literature reviewed shows that these tools can be effectively used for writing but not as substitutes for critical writing.

Linguistic, Cultural, and Structural Challenges in Academic Publishing

In addition to issues related to English proficiency and support, Saudi postgraduate students face a deep-rooted barrier that may prevent them from participating in international academic publications (Alshaye, 2025). Across the reviewed literature, the prevalence of English in international academic publications may put scholars in countries whose native cultures and educational systems do not conform to the Anglo-Saxon paradigm at a disadvantage in recognition of their work (Hãó, 2024). It results in a high level of rejection or an emphasis on language rather than on research quality and relevance. The importance of English reinforces the existing hierarchy of publishing standards, requires native-speaker fluency, and overlooks research from countries where English is not the native language (Itoi, 2023).

The various cultural practices that exist shape how people build arguments, present evidence, and relate to one another academically. Several studies reported that such practices may hinder Saudi academics' efforts to comply with the tacit requirements of the peer-review process (Elgamri et al., 2024). A study by Yuan et al. (2022) revealed that, in non-English-speaking nations, the perception of inadequacy in terms of rhetorical and scholarly traditions, irrespective of how good a study was, would usually result in negative criticisms and a lack of confidence on behalf of non-English-speaking writers. The above-mentioned differences between cultures and languages can be attributed to epistemic inequalities, whereby knowledge and methodologies at the grassroots level cannot be accommodated within dominant Western modes of knowledge production. Figure 4 illustrates the challenges that Saudi postgraduate students face in publishing their work.

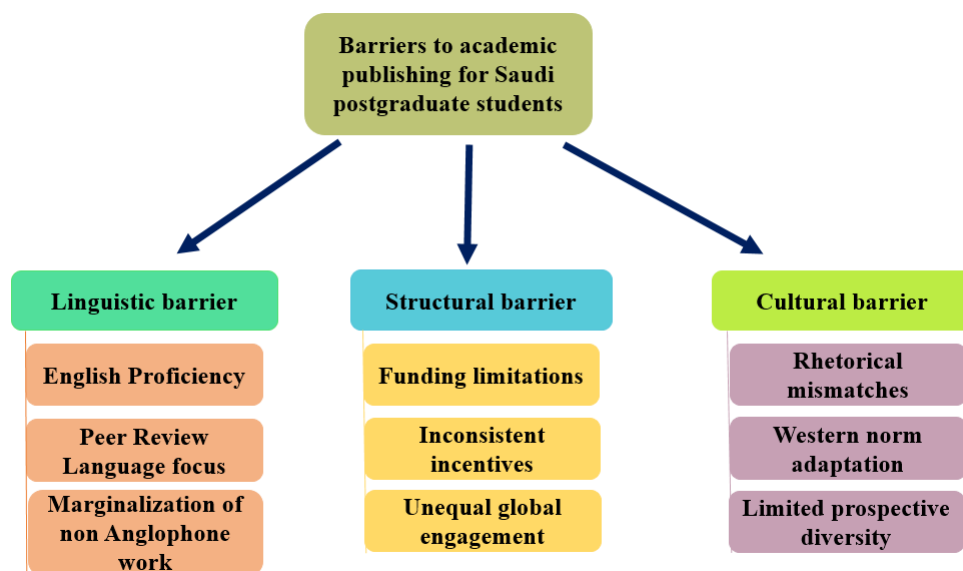


Figure 4. Provides a visual representation of the language, cultural, and structural barriers that affect Saudi postgraduate students' participation in international publishing practices

Structural barriers further compound these linguistic and cultural challenges. Many Saudi postgraduate students and academic staff work in an environment with limited access to high-quality editing services and with unclear, inconsistent motivation to publish. (Jama, 2024). Qualitative studies at Saudi and other non-English-speaking universities indicate that researchers frequently face procedural challenges in the peer review process and financial burdens associated with manuscript preparation (Sajedi et al., 2021). They also often have limited access to internationally connected research networks, all of which contribute to disparities in research outcomes. The researchers also had limited access to internationally connected research networks. These cumulative barriers not only affect publication success but also the scholar's confidence and willingness to continue contributing to the global academic community, thereby contributing to inequalities in global knowledge production (Hãó, 2024). The evidence examined above shows that linguistic, cultural, and structural barriers are

interrelated. Linguistic, cultural, and structural barriers do not operate independently; they all act together to enable success and participation in the international academic arena.

An Integrated Framework for Academic Publishing

The suggested framework is the result of a thematic analysis of the 109 sources examined in this literature review. Four major themes have been identified in the literature: (1) linguistic and rhetorical issues; (2) institutional support and mentoring programs; (3) AI-enabled writing tools; and (4) structural/policy-related issues affecting publication success. The above themes have been contextualized to illustrate the effects of various aspects on English for Academic Publishing amongst Saudi postgraduates. Therefore, the framework constitutes a synthesis of important findings from the sources analyzed within the literature review.

Building on the synthesized literature, an integrative framework for English for Academic Publishing is proposed for the Saudi Arabian context that simultaneously addresses linguistic, institutional, technological, and structural issues. Central to this framework is the delivery of early and sustained academic writing instruction that goes beyond the generic provision of English courses to include writing-for-publication courses within discipline-specific postgraduate curricula (Yan Li & Yeh, 2024). Such instruction not only enhances linguistic competence but also helps students become accustomed to international research genres and peer-review practices, a trend also underscored by recent studies that emphasize the need to better connect English-language policy with the country's development goals and priorities set by the Saudi Vision 2030 initiative.

Complementing curricular reform, the framework advocates that embedded writing center work and mentoring programs extend beyond supervisory mentoring to provide students with long-term, developmental writing center work, including ERPP training, manuscript work, and peer-review practice. (Becker et al., 2025). Writing centers should be promoted as long-term developmental hubs that continue to provide ERPP training, manuscript clinics, and opportunities for peer review practice (J. Zhang & Liu, 2023). In parallel, Babatope (2025) also highlighted that mentoring structures should be enhanced through supervisor training, peer mentoring networks, and cross-disciplinary writing groups to facilitate the gradual development of scholarly identity. Such institutional mechanisms will help fill the identified gaps in the support system and the mentoring process in the Saudi higher education system, which has shown inconsistency and a lack of formality in student publications outcomes.

Finally, the focus will be on the ethical use of AI writing tools in the postgraduate support system and at the policy level, in alignment with the Vision 2030 and SDGs research excellence agendas. AI software can play a constructive role in writing and editing, and students gain a significant advantage by using it, as it helps them pay attention to academic conventions (Guo et al., 2025). Policies must be formulated by institutions that promote the ethical application of AI, provide financial opportunities for editing and publication, and complement nations' research productivity goals. In all these areas, it is important to recognize that the framework promotes sustainable, inclusive opportunities for postgraduate researchers from Saudi Arabia to effectively compete for publication in international scholarly journals.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this review carry important implications for higher education institutions, supervisors, and policymakers keen to improve postgraduates' engagement with international academic publishing. At an institutional level, higher education institutions need to transcend remedial and short-term approaches to writing support and embrace a holistic, curriculum-based approach to publishing literacy across postgraduate education. Incorporating academic writing, research communication, and publication skills in the disciplines within postgraduate programs has the potential to improve the capacity of students to contribute to global knowledge production processes in meaningful ways, as well as promote independent scholarly work in the long term (Ellefson & Monfared, 2025; Yang et al., 2025). In the Saudi Arabian context of postgraduate education, therefore, it is important not whether one uses AI, but rather how to develop integration frameworks that enable such integration.

At the policy level, the recommendations align well with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goals 4 (Quality Education), 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Developing academic publishing capacity among postgraduate researchers directly contributes to achieving SDG 4 by promoting inclusive, high-quality education that enables learners to acquire higher-level skills, such as research and communication skills (Semerikov, 2024). Academic publishing skills also contribute to achieving SDG 9 by increasing the country's research output, an economic driver of sustainable development. Additionally, by helping Saudi Arabia's postgraduate students confidently interact with international journals, SDG 17 can be achieved through the formation of international academic partnerships and collaborations (Singh & Blessinger, 2023).

The importance of the relationship between academic publications and Saudi Arabia's development goals is underscored by the fact that, through their linkage to Vision 2030 and the SDGs, academic publications can be viewed not only as personal success but also as a Saudi investment in its future. It is, therefore, encouraged that language development, mentoring systems, responsible AI practices, and publications be factored into the design and implementation of research and higher education policies to promote and advance English for Academic Publishing towards a better achievement of sustainable development goals, reducing inequalities in global research production, and increasing Saudi Arabia's presence on the global research map.

5. Discussion

The results of the current literature review indicate that the English for Academic Publishing (EAP) process among Saudi postgraduates is influenced by numerous linguistic, structural, technological, and institutional factors. Although most of the discussed articles focus on the general situation in NNES environments, they can offer some insight into academic publishing among Saudi postgraduates. Most importantly, the findings negate the reductionist view that associates publishing problems with low English proficiency. Instead, academic publication depends on mentorship, knowledge of the discourse conventions within one's field, and an understanding of the social conventions of peer review (Minocha et al., 2025). The multidimensional model used in the current study aligns with modern studies that emphasize situating writing for publication within the wider social context as an integral part of the global knowledge-creation system (Sharma et al., 2025). The notion of Academic Literacies suggests that academic writing involves not only proficiency but also identity, epistemology, and community affiliation, among other things. As noted by Lehman (2026), writing in a second language requires scholars to negotiate voice, authority, and legitimacy within dominant Anglophone norms. In the Saudi case, while postgraduates demonstrate a solid grasp of content knowledge, their weakness lies in developing arguments, finding their own voices as writers, and responding appropriately to reviewers' feedback. These kinds of difficulties do not arise solely from linguistic mistakes, but from genre knowledge. Recent empirical studies by (2025) and Liu & Chen (2025) also demonstrate that multilingual scholars experience conflicting feelings about the need to preserve their language identity amid pressures to adopt standardized academic language, an issue that may affect their confidence in writing and the publication process. Additional empirical evidence from recent studies, such as those by Zhu & Li (2025) and P. Zhao & Warren (2025), also confirms this conflict among multilingual academics.

An additional critical insight drawn from this literature review is that there is an uneven provision of institution-based facilities for developing writing skills in Saudi universities. Despite the presence of writing centers, mentoring programs, and research assistance at some universities, their availability is inconsistent. This helps prove that stand-alone initiatives, such as workshops, are not enough. Instead, there has been increasing emphasis on embedding and longitudinal programs within graduate studies (Gainsford & Attree, 2026; Liechty et al., 2022). For instance, Williams et al. (2023) emphasize the value of continual mentoring and feedback in improving the quality of articles for publication. Similarly, Imsa-ard & Barrot (2024) emphasized that writing centers serve their role best when they operate as continual developmental centers and not just another service available to students. Such a lack of these strategies in Saudi Arabia could widen the gap between research productivity and international presence. Mentorship is revealed as one of the most important elements in filling the knowledge gap between novice and seasoned scholars. Proper mentoring ensures access to implicit disciplinary knowledge, which can range from framing research outputs to journal selection and responding to peer reviews (Pizzolato & Dierickx, 2023). On the other hand, according to the review, mentoring practices in the Saudi higher education system are informal and rely on personal supervisors, leading to discrepancies in students' performance. The review results are consistent with the literature, which emphasizes the importance of mentoring systems in ensuring equal opportunities in academic publishing.

The emergence of AI-based writing tools, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot, represents a remarkable advancement in academic writing. Research indicates that AI-based writing tools help improve linguistic skills, enhance coherence, and speed up writing among NNES scholars (Munawwaroh & Fahreza, 2025; Nguyen & Bao Chau Tran, 2026). Results from large-scale empirical research demonstrate the potential of AI to reduce disparities in academic standards between native and non-native writers by helping them adhere to appropriate standards (Prakash et al., 2025). However, this literature review also identifies important problems associated with over-reliance on such technologies. Artificial intelligence without appropriate supervision can contribute to uniformity and homogeneity in writing (Velandia-Rodríguez et al., 2025). Furthermore, Ethics associated with authorship are receiving increasing attention in recent literature (Kishan & Gupta, 2024).

It is important to note that the specific Saudi context makes the gap unique, as there has been no empirical work on the use of AI technology in the context of education ethics in postgraduate studies. The lack of such research underscores the need to develop an institutional policy that views AI technologies as scaffolding rather than replacements, in line with existing global recommendations. Based on evidence synthesized from the included studies, an integrated framework was developed to address the major challenges that were identified in this review. The framework was informed by four recurring issues that have repeatedly occurred: (1) the need for writing education according to the specificities of the disciplines, (2) the necessity of continuous institutional support through writing centers and mentoring programs, (3) proper use of AI writing technologies, and (4) equitable policies of participating in international publications through institutional support. These themes became the theoretical background for developing an integrated framework. Rather than an empirically validated model, the framework is considered a theoretically grounded synthesis of existing evidence. Although the proposed framework has not been empirically validated, it provides a theoretical basis to inform institutional efforts to enhance postgraduate publication capabilities in line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. In this regard, the integrated framework aligns with the current literature, which calls for a departure from deficit models to examine structural inequalities in academic publishing worldwide (Kolluri & Tichavakunda, 2023; Lee et al., 2024). Through this integrated framework, Saudi universities would be able to contribute to their individual publications and to broader national research visibility.

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across postgraduate education. Incorporating academic writing, research communication, and publication skills in the disciplines within postgraduate programs has the potential to improve the capacity of students to contribute to global knowledge production processes in meaningful ways, as well as promote independent scholarly work in the long term (Ellefson & Monfared, 2025; Yang et al., 2025). In the Saudi Arabian context of postgraduate education, therefore, it is important not whether one uses AI, but rather how to develop frameworks for integrating it.

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The importance of the relationship between academic publications and Saudi Arabia's development goals is highlighted by the fact that, through this linkage to Vision 2030 and the SDGs, academic publications can be viewed not only as personal success but also as a Saudi investment in its future. It is, therefore, encouraged that language development, mentoring systems, responsible AI practices, and publications be factored into the design and implementation of research and higher education policies to promote and advance English for Academic Publishing towards a better achievement of sustainable development goals, reducing inequalities in global research production, and increasing Saudi Arabia's presence on the global research map.

6. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, this literature review was based on English-language articles; therefore, relevant information from Arabic-language articles may have been overlooked. Secondly, it was impossible to conduct a quantitative meta-analysis due to methodological differences and conclusions across the studies. Thirdly, the majority of the analyzed literature was conducted in other countries rather than in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the results are preliminary and only indicative.

7. Future Prospects

Further research needs to move beyond the descriptive phase and examine the efficacy of strategies to increase the publication success rate of postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia. This includes longitudinal research on publication success after getting assistance from the writing center, experimental research on mentorship schemes, comparison across Gulf countries, ethical use of technology such as artificial intelligence for writing the thesis and publishing, discipline-based barriers in STEM and humanities subjects, gender issues in academic publication, and supervisor perspectives on publication mentoring. Such research would strengthen evidence-based policymaking in Saudi higher education.

8. Conclusion

English for Academic Publishing remains a challenge for postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia, and several factors influence this challenge, including students' language abilities, academic literacies, institutional and technological support, and the global publishing system. This review demonstrates that publishing should not be thought of in terms of individual linguistic problems, but rather in terms of socially situated practices, and knowledge economies dominated by English and publishing itself. The value of synthesizing recent research lies in highlighting the importance of developing integrated, language-focused, and policy-sensitive systems of support that extend across postgraduate education. The finding suggests that academic writing development, mentoring structures, writing centers, and the ethical use of AI-assisted tools may strengthen publication literacy and scholarly participation. Based on these identified themes in the reviewed literature, a framework was proposed to illustrate how these interconnected factors may be addressed within the Saudi higher education context. This framework should be viewed as a theoretically informed model of the existing literature, rather than an empirical intervention that requires further testing of its application and effectiveness. However, the framework represents an important starting point for designing institutional policies and for conducting further studies on how to increase postgraduate engagement with international academic publishing. In this way, developing English for Academic Publishing skills can help achieve other purposes, including research development and international visibility, in line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

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Ethical Considerations

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Competing interests

The author declares that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

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Ethics approval

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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