

From Fragmented Writing Tasks to Transformative Academic Reasoning: A Qualitative Needs Analysis for a Project-Based Hyflex Academic Writing Model

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ABSTRACT:

Academic writing instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) higher education often emphasizes writing products rather than academic reasoning and revision skills. This study conducted a qualitative needs analysis to develop a Transformative Project-Based Learning–HyFlex (TPjBL-HyFlex) model for academic writing. Data were collected from 25 lecturer and 25 student interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis, stakeholder comparison, and thematic network visualization. The findings revealed that students experienced difficulties in idea development, coherence, source literacy, academic language, and revision. Existing instructional practices, including project work, feedback, and online learning, remained fragmented and lacked a coherent instructional framework. Both lecturers and students emphasized the need for authentic writing tasks, scaffolded learning materials, structured feedback, collaborative learning, transparent assessment, and purposeful HyFlex implementation. The study provides an empirical foundation for developing a TPjBL-HyFlex model that strengthens academic reasoning and learner autonomy in EFL higher education.

Keywords: academic writing; project-based learning; transformative learning; HyFlex learning; feedback literacy; needs analysis; EFL higher education.

1. BACKGROUND

Academic writing is one of the most challenging competencies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) higher education because it requires students to integrate language proficiency, disciplinary reasoning, source use, genre awareness, and revision skills. Students may produce grammatically accurate texts but still struggle to construct coherent arguments, synthesize evidence, and position their ideas within academic discourse. From the perspective of academic literacies, writing is not merely a linguistic skill but a socially situated practice shaped by disciplinary conventions, identities,

and academic expectations (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). Consequently, effective academic writing instruction should foster academic reasoning rather than focus solely on language accuracy.

Despite this expectation, academic writing courses in many universities remain dominated by fragmented instructional practices. Students typically complete topic selection, drafting, feedback, and revision as separate activities without a coherent learning framework connecting these stages. As a result, writing is often viewed as a product-oriented task rather than a recursive process of inquiry, reflection, and knowledge construction.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been widely recognized as an effective approach for promoting authentic learning through inquiry, collaboration, iterative production, and meaningful outputs. Studies have shown that PjBL can improve learner engagement, responsibility, and writing performance when supported by clear learning stages and appropriate scaffolding (Guo et al., 2020; Arochman et al., 2024; Ilham, 2022). However, project work alone does not ensure effective learning unless it is guided by explicit inquiry, continuous feedback, and systematic assessment.

Transformative Learning provides an additional perspective by emphasizing critical reflection and changes in learners' frames of reference (Mezirow, 2003). In academic writing, this transformation occurs when students shift from viewing writing as a course requirement to understanding it as a process of evidence-based academic reasoning. Reflection and iterative feedback therefore become essential components for developing higher-order thinking and revision literacy (Taylor, 2007; Colomer et al., 2020).

The rapid expansion of HyFlex learning has further reshaped higher education by combining face-to-face, synchronous, asynchronous, and online learning modes. While HyFlex increases flexibility and learner autonomy, its effectiveness depends on selecting appropriate learning modalities for different writing activities. For example, synchronous sessions are more suitable for discussion and feedback, whereas asynchronous environments better support reading, drafting, and revision (Detyna et al., 2023; Müller et al., 2023). Thus, HyFlex should function as a pedagogical strategy rather than simply a technological option.

Although previous studies have investigated PjBL, transformative learning, and HyFlex independently, limited research has integrated these three approaches into a comprehensive academic writing model. Existing studies also rarely examine instructional needs from both lecturer and student perspectives as the basis for model development. This represents an important gap because instructional models

developed without systematic needs analysis often lack alignment with classroom realities.

Therefore, this study conducts a qualitative needs analysis to develop a Transformative Project-Based Learning–HyFlex (TPjBL-HyFlex) model for academic writing in EFL higher education. Drawing on interviews with lecturers and students, the study identifies instructional needs related to learning activities, materials, feedback, assessment, collaboration, and learning modalities. The findings provide an empirical foundation for designing a coherent academic writing model that promotes academic reasoning, learner autonomy, and meaningful integration of project-based, transformative, and HyFlex learning environments.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative needs-analysis design to identify the instructional requirements for developing the Transformative Project-Based Learning–HyFlex (TPjBL-HyFlex) academic writing model. A needs-analysis approach was selected because it enables the identification of gaps between current instructional practices, stakeholder expectations, and the learning design required to support academic writing development (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The study involved 50 interview documents, comprising 25 lecturers and 25 students, to capture both teaching and learning perspectives. Lecturer interviews explored instructional practices, assessment, feedback, feasibility, and HyFlex implementation, while student interviews focused on writing difficulties, learning experiences, collaboration, feedback needs, and flexible learning preferences. Participants were anonymized using lecturer (L01–L25) and student (S01–S25) codes.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved familiarization with the interview data, initial coding, theme development, cross-document comparison, and synthesis of design implications. Fourteen themes were identified covering existing instructional practices, learning needs, instructional materials, collaboration, feedback, assessment, HyFlex learning, and implementation

support. To strengthen interpretation, document-level theme frequencies, a meaning-unit audit (181 coded excerpts), and thematic network visualization were used to examine relationships among themes and support the development of the proposed instructional model (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Nowell et al., 2017).

The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through an audit trail linking interview data, coding, themes, representative quotations, and design implications. Lecturer and student data were analyzed separately before integration to identify convergent and divergent perspectives. Theme frequencies were used only to indicate qualitative salience rather than statistical generalization, while thematic interpretation remained the primary basis for developing the TPjBL-HyFlex model.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Overview of theme occurrence

The document-level frequency analysis shows strong convergence between lecturer and student perspectives across the 14 themes. As shown in Figure 2, academic writing skill gaps, feedback and revision, and purposeful HyFlex modality appeared in all lecturer and student documents. Other themes, including authentic academic purpose, scaffolded materials, source literacy, process-product assessment, and transformative reflection, also showed consistently high occurrence. This pattern suggests that the need for a TPjBL-HyFlex model is not associated with a single isolated problem, but with a cluster of interrelated needs involving writing development, instructional structure, feedback processes, assessment, and learning modality.

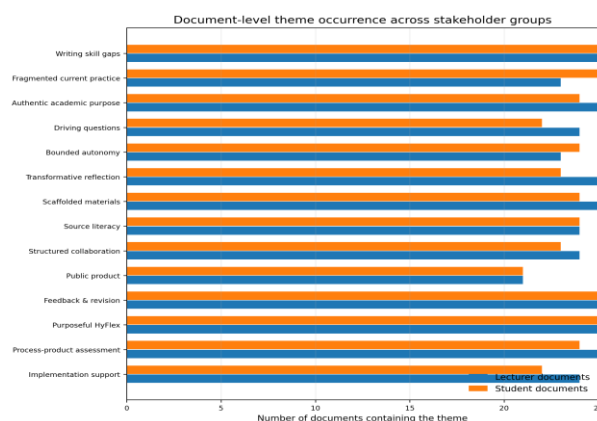


Figure 1. Document-level theme occurrence across lecturer and student interviews.

Figure 2 shows that the strongest convergence occurred in T01, T11, and T12, each of which appeared in all 50 documents. The universal occurrence of T01 confirms that academic writing skill gaps constituted the central instructional concern across stakeholder groups. The equally strong presence of T11 indicates that feedback and revision were perceived as core mechanisms for writing development. Meanwhile, the prominence of T12 shows that HyFlex modality was closely connected to how academic writing activities were accessed, sequenced, monitored, and supported. Together, these findings suggest that writing instruction

requires an integrated design that connects skill development, source-based inquiry, feedback, revision, assessment, and modality planning.

A smaller degree of variation was also observed across several themes. Lecturer documents showed slightly higher occurrence for driving questions, transformative reflection, scaffolded materials, and implementation support, suggesting greater concern with instructional architecture and feasibility. Student documents, in contrast, showed slightly higher occurrence for fragmented current practice and bounded autonomy, reflecting students' need for clarity, guidance, and manageable choice within the

learning process. Despite these differences, the overall frequency pattern indicates substantial alignment between lecturer and student perspectives. To provide the exact numerical

distribution underlying the visual pattern in Figure 2, Table 3 presents the document-level frequency counts for each theme across lecturer and student documents.

Table 3: Document-level theme frequency

Code	Theme	Lecturer n	Student n	Total n	Priority
T01	Writing skill gaps	25	25	50	Very High
T02	Fragmented current practice	23	25	48	Very High
T03	Authentic academic purpose	25	24	49	Very High
T04	Driving questions	24	22	46	High
T05	Bounded autonomy	23	24	47	High
T06	Transformative reflection	25	23	48	Very High
T07	Scaffolded materials	25	24	49	Very High
T08	Source literacy	24	24	48	Very High
T09	Structured collaboration	24	23	47	High
T10	Public product	21	21	42	Moderate
T11	Feedback & revision	25	25	50	Very High
T12	Purposeful HyFlex	25	25	50	Very High
T13	Process-product assessment	25	24	49	Very High
T14	Implementation support	24	22	46	High

As shown in Table 3, most themes reached high or very high occurrence across the dataset, while public product showed the lowest overall frequency. These numerical details support the interpretation that the proposed model should prioritize writing skill development, feedback and revision, purposeful modality, source support, and process-based assessment as central design components.

3.2 Existing condition: academic writing as multidimensional difficulty

The first major finding is that academic writing was perceived as a multidimensional ability rather than a narrow language skill. Lecturers and students repeatedly described difficulties in idea development, paragraph organization, coherence, argument structure, source use, academic language, and revision. One lecturer observed that students' writing ability varied considerably:

some could express ideas, while others did not know where to begin (L01, U001). Another lecturer stated that constructing a coherent paragraph remained difficult for some students (L01, U002). These statements show that the writing problem begins before the final draft. It begins when students attempt to select an issue, narrow a topic, organize claims, connect evidence, and decide what their writing is trying to do.

The student perspective confirmed the same pattern from inside the learning experience. One student explained that at the beginning of the course, academic writing seemed like ordinary writing, but later became difficult because of its rules, topic development, and academic language demands (S01, U101). This is an important indicator of conceptual shift. Students do not merely need correction; they need a change in

how they understand academic writing. The need for transformative learning therefore appears directly in the data. Students must be guided from writing as task completion toward writing as structured academic reasoning.

The finding also challenges instruction that begins with final product expectations. Asking students to write an academic essay or article without diagnostic writing, source scaffolding, model texts, argument mapping, and revision support assumes that they already possess the cognitive tools needed for the task. That assumption is not supported by the data. A TPjBL-HyFlex model must therefore begin with diagnosis and scaffolding, not with immediate demand for polished products. This is not lowering standards. It is admitting that standards require a route, not just a destination.

3.3 Existing condition: useful practices exist, but the design is fragmented

The second existing-condition finding is that relevant instructional practices were already present, but not sufficiently integrated. Lecturers reported using staged outputs, discussions, reflection, online activities, and feedback. One lecturer noted that the practice might not always be formally labeled as PjBL or HyFlex, but elements of it existed (L01, U003). Another lecturer described staged outputs from outline to first draft, revision, and final text (L02, U028). This is significant because the model does not need to be invented from nothing. The raw materials of the model already exist. The weakness is fragmentation. A staged writing task is not automatically PjBL. For it to operate as PjBL, students must work through a driving question, conduct sustained inquiry, use sources, collaborate meaningfully, receive feedback, revise, and produce something with an authentic audience or academic function. Similarly, reflection is not automatically transformative. It must help students examine initial assumptions, interpret feedback, justify revisions, and recognize changes in their academic reasoning. Flexible learning is not automatically HyFlex. It must map learning modes to activity types and include monitoring mechanisms.

This finding is strategically important. The recommended model should not insult existing practice by pretending that lecturers have done nothing. That would be methodologically inaccurate. Instead, the model should formalize and connect what is already emerging: staged writing, guided inquiry, reflective prompts, feedback, revision, portfolio evidence, peer dialogue, and purposeful modality. The development task is therefore architectural. It must convert dispersed good practices into a replicable instructional system.

3.4 Lecturer needs: operational structure for authentic and manageable writing instruction

Lecturers emphasized the need for authentic and operational learning objectives. General objectives such as “students are able to write academic essays” were considered insufficient because they do not give students a clear route. Lecturers preferred objectives connected to real academic products such as source-based arguments, academic responses, research-related paragraphs, proposal sections, and simple articles (L01, U007; L01, U008). This need implies that each project cycle should produce visible artifacts: issue statements, source matrices, argument maps, outlines, drafts, revision logs, and final texts. Lecturers also needed driving questions to guide inquiry and perspective change. A clear question was seen as useful for focusing source searching, discussion, and writing (L01, U009). Another lecturer stated that the question was not merely an opening but the determinant of direction (L02, U037). In a TPjBL-HyFlex model, the driving question should not be an ornamental prompt. It should define the problem space, require evidence, and make students reconsider simplistic opinions. A weak prompt asks students to define a concept. A stronger prompt asks them to explain why a persistent academic problem occurs and what evidence-based position can be defended.

Guided autonomy was another lecturer need. Lecturers valued student choice but insisted that choice must operate within academic boundaries. One lecturer described giving students space to

choose topics, viewpoints, or ways of developing ideas, while keeping the final target clear (L01, U011; L01, U012). Another warned that flexibility can become confusion if not controlled (L02, U040). This distinction is vital. Student voice is not the same as abandoning students to the wilderness of topic selection. The model must provide topic menus, approval checkpoints, scope boundaries, source requirements, and consultation points. Lecturers also needed contextual and scaffolded materials. The data show a preference for materials that move students from reading sources, identifying main ideas, comparing perspectives, and mapping evidence to claims before writing. Materials should include annotated model texts, source credibility checklists, source comparison matrices, evidence-to-claim worksheets, argument maps, outline templates, citation guides, revision checklists, and reflection prompts. This is not a minor materials issue. It is the concrete mechanism through which academic writing becomes teachable rather than mysterious. Feedback and assessment needs were especially strong. Lecturers recognized that feedback should be staged from content and organization toward language accuracy. One lecturer explained that not everything should be corrected at once; content and organization may be addressed first, followed by language (L01, U019). Lecturers also emphasized process assessment rather than final-product-only grading (L01, U022). These needs point toward portfolio assessment with analytic rubrics. The model must make feedback manageable for lecturers and usable for students. Otherwise, feedback may remain difficult for students to interpret and apply.

Finally, lecturers needed HyFlex design that reduces confusion rather than multiplying workload. One participant noted that lecturers have to manage online and offline students simultaneously, which can split attention (L20, U086). The model must therefore define which activities should be face-to-face, synchronous online, or asynchronous. Complex explanation and feedback clinics may need face-to-face or synchronous interaction. Reading, source notes, drafting, and reflection can be asynchronous with clear evidence requirements. Peer review can occur in shared documents but must have rubrics and role distribution. Purposeful modality is therefore a workload strategy as much as a learner-access strategy.

3.5 Student needs: clarity, scaffolded autonomy, feedback, and disciplined flexibility

The student data identified several practical needs for the development of the TPjBL-HyFlex academic writing model: clear learning direction, scaffolded autonomy, source guidance, actionable feedback, structured collaboration, and disciplined flexibility. These needs sharpen the design implications because they show how students experienced academic writing not only as a writing task, but also as a sequence of decisions that required guidance, feedback, accountability, and visible learning structure. The unit-level evidence distribution supports this interpretation by showing that student meaning units were concentrated in themes related to collaboration, assessment, source literacy, feedback, modality, and writing difficulty.

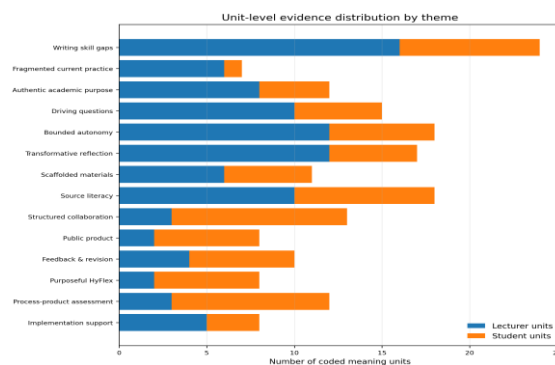


Figure 2. Unit-level distribution of coded meaning units by theme and stakeholder group.

Figure 3 shows that student evidence was particularly visible in structured collaboration, process-product assessment, writing skill gaps, source literacy, feedback and revision, purposeful HyFlex, public product, and bounded autonomy. This pattern indicates that students were not only concerned with the final writing product, but also with the learning conditions that made writing development possible. Their responses emphasized the need for clear task direction, guided topic selection, reliable source support, usable feedback, accountable collaboration, transparent assessment, and flexibility that remained structured. In this sense, the student data provided practical guidance for translating the broader model into learner-facing procedures and support tools.

Students' needs sharpened the practical implications of the model. Students wanted clear goals and a visible learning map. One student stated that objectives should not be too general because unclear goals make the direction confusing (S01, U103). Another connected useful academic writing tasks with essays, proposals, or simple articles (S01, U104). Students therefore need a project brief that explains the driving question, expected product, timeline, process evidence, assessment criteria, and reflection requirements. They need explicit guidance that connects weekly activities to the final academic product.

Students also wanted autonomy, but not unlimited choice. One student said that having choices made the learning more engaging (S01, U107), but the same participant warned that too much freedom led to confusion (S01, U108). This confirms the need for bounded autonomy. Students should be able to choose issues that matter to them, but their choices must be narrowed through scope boundaries, source requirements, and checkpoints. The model should make academic decision-making visible: choose an issue, narrow it, ask a question, justify source relevance, map claims, and plan an argument.

Source guidance was another major student need. Students reported uncertainty about which

sources were truly appropriate (S01, U111), and lecturer evidence also indicated that students needed help evaluating source quality (S10, U136). This finding is directly connected to source-based writing literature. Students may be able to search for articles, but searching is not the same as reading critically, comparing positions, or using evidence. The model must therefore include source credibility checklists, source comparison grids, paraphrasing guidance, and evidence-to-claim mapping before drafting begins.

Students needed feedback that could be acted upon. They valued lecturer feedback because it was often clearer (S01, U120), but some also reported knowing that something was wrong without knowing how to fix it (S01, U121). This is a classic feedback literacy problem. Feedback must identify what needs attention, why it matters, and what revision action is possible. Students also need to document their uptake of feedback through a response-to-feedback log. This turns revision into visible evidence of learning.

Students also valued collaboration but experienced the familiar problems of group work: uneven participation, unclear roles, slow responses, and dominance by certain members. One student stated that group work was easier when task distribution was clear (S01, U114), while another data segment pointed to unequal participation (S10, U138). The model should not romanticize collaboration. It must design it. Collaboration should include role cards, peer review sheets, group contracts, contribution logs, and specific products at each collaborative phase. Without these tools, group work may intensify unequal participation and reduce accountability.

The final student need concerns flexible modality. Students valued face-to-face meetings for complex materials and focus (S01, U122), while asynchronous work was useful for reading and independent thinking (S10, U146). However, asynchronous learning also created procrastination (S01, U123). This apparent tension identifies the main design problem. Flexibility supports writing only when

accompanied by mini-deadlines, progress checks, and evidence artifacts. A TPjBL-HyFlex model must therefore make asynchronous work visible through outputs such as source notes, annotated drafts, reflection logs, and revision plans.

To provide the detailed numerical distribution behind the unit-level pattern, Table 4 presents the

number of coded meaning units across lecturer and student data. Although the table includes both stakeholder groups, its placement here helps contextualize the student findings within the broader evidence base and shows how student needs relate to the overall thematic structure of the study.

Table 4: Unit-level meaning-unit distribution

Code	Theme	Lecturer units	Student units	Total units
T01	Writing skill gaps	16	8	24
T02	Fragmented current practice	6	1	7
T03	Authentic academic purpose	8	4	12
T04	Driving questions	10	5	15
T05	Bounded autonomy	12	6	18
T06	Transformative reflection	12	5	17
T07	Scaffolded materials	6	5	11
T08	Source literacy	10	8	18
T09	Structured collaboration	3	10	13
T10	Public product	2	6	8
T11	Feedback & revision	4	6	10
T12	Purposeful HyFlex	2	6	8
T13	Process-product assessment	3	9	12
T14	Implementation support	5	3	8

As shown in Table 4, student units were especially prominent in structured collaboration, process-product assessment, source literacy, feedback and revision, purposeful HyFlex, and public product. These numerical details reinforce the interpretation that students needed more than writing instruction in a narrow sense. They needed a learning design that made expectations visible, guided academic choices, supported source use, structured collaboration, clarified assessment, and made flexible participation accountable. Therefore, the student findings support the development of a TPjBL-HyFlex model that combines clarity, autonomy, feedback, collaboration, and disciplined flexibility as interconnected design principles.

3.6 Thematic network: central nodes in the design architecture

The thematic network analysis was used to visualize relationships among themes based on co-occurrence and semantic linkage. The visualization was descriptive rather than inferential, and its purpose was to support interpretation of how the themes were connected within the design logic of the proposed TPjBL-HyFlex academic writing model. As shown in Figure 4, the needs identified in the study did not operate as separate instructional concerns. Instead, several themes clustered around the broader challenge of developing academic writing as source-based academic reasoning.

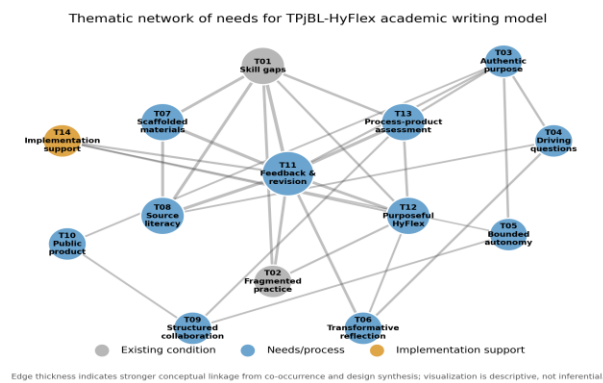


Figure 3. Thematic network of co-occurring needs and design components.

Figure 4 shows that feedback and revision, writing skill gaps, scaffolded materials, source literacy, process-product assessment, and purposeful HyFlex modality occupied central positions in the thematic network. This pattern indicates that the proposed model cannot address academic writing development by treating these components separately. Feedback without documented revision would have limited instructional value. Source literacy without argument mapping would remain incomplete. Similarly, HyFlex learning without clear outputs, mini-deadlines, and evidence artifacts would risk becoming a scheduling arrangement rather than a pedagogical design.

The central position of feedback and revision is particularly important. In the network, feedback connects writing skill gaps, scaffolded materials, source literacy, assessment, and modality. This suggests that feedback functions as a developmental mechanism through which students interpret expectations, revise their texts, and make progress visible. If feedback occurs

only after final submission, it loses much of its formative value. If revision is not documented or assessed, students may treat feedback as optional rather than as part of the learning process. The model should therefore position feedback as staged, focused, documented, and connected to portfolio evidence.

Purposeful HyFlex modality also appears as a key design node because modality shapes how students encounter each stage of academic writing development. Source reading and reflective logs may be conducted asynchronously, while discussion, feedback clinics, and negotiation of meaning may require synchronous or face-to-face interaction. This means that HyFlex should not be added to the model as a delivery option after the instructional design has been completed. It should be embedded from the beginning as an activity-based modality plan. To support the visual interpretation of the network, Table 5 presents the highest-centrality themes in the thematic network.

Table 5: Highest-centrality themes in the thematic network

Code	Central theme	Degree strength	Normalized centrality	Total documents
T11	Feedback and revision cycle	892	1.000	50
T01	Academic writing skill gaps	882	0.907	50
T07	Scaffolded materials	879	0.880	49
T13	Process-product assessment	879	0.880	49
T08	Source literacy	878	0.870	48
T12	Purposeful HyFlex modality	875	0.843	50

T02	Fragmented current practice	873	0.824	48
T03	Authentic academic purpose	870	0.796	49

Table 5 confirms the visual pattern shown in Figure 4. Feedback and revision had the highest normalized centrality score, followed by academic writing skill gaps, scaffolded materials, process-product assessment, source literacy, and purposeful HyFlex modality. These values reinforce the interpretation that the model should be organized around an integrated feedback-revision cycle supported by diagnostic writing, scaffolded materials, source-based inquiry, process-product assessment, and purposeful modality mapping. The network therefore provides a design rationale for treating academic writing not as final-text production, but as a connected process of inquiry, feedback, revision, reflection, and public academic communication.

4. CONCLUSION

This study developed a grounded needs analysis for a TPjBL-HyFlex academic writing model. The findings show that academic writing difficulties in EFL higher education are multidimensional and include idea development, organization, argument building, source literacy, academic language, and revision. Existing instruction already contains useful practices such as staged writing tasks, discussion, reflection, feedback, and blended learning, but these practices remain fragmented when they are not organized into an explicit instructional model.

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