



ORIGINAL

## Challenges in developing productive skills in English: learners' insights

### Desafíos en el desarrollo de habilidades productivas en inglés: percepciones de los estudiantes

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#### ABSTRACT

Academic writing and speaking are important skills that English major students must acquire during their four years of study. However, they face significant challenges. The aim of this research is to identify the main challenges in productive skills faced by students majoring in English at the Technical University of Cotopaxi from the fifth to the eighth semester. This research used a quantitative approach and with a descriptive statistical methodology. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire that consisted of 4 sections: demographic data, students' perceptions of academic speaking and writing, challenges of academic writing, covering language, structure, and content. Lastly, academic speaking, covering speech clarity and voice quality, language correctness, and audience interaction. The population of this study were 46 students from fifth to eighth semester of the English major. The data were analyzed using SPSS and Excel statistic programs. The results of this research showed that in academic writing and speaking the challenges that students have are in terms of language, clarity of speech and voice quality. In addition, an interconnection was found between the content of academic writing, and speech clarity and voice quality, language correctness and interaction with the audience. In conclusion, this research identified challenges in academic writing (content, structure, and language use) and academic speaking (clarity of speech and voice quality, language correctness and audience interaction). These challenges highlight the crucial role of clear communication in students' learning process.

**Keywords:** Communication; Challenges; Language Interaction; Productive Skills; Speech.

#### RESUMEN

La escritura y la expresión orales académicas son destrezas importantes que los estudiantes de inglés deben adquirir durante sus cuatro años de estudio. Sin embargo, enfrentan importantes desafíos. El objetivo de esta investigación es identificar los principales desafíos en habilidades productivas que enfrentan los estudiantes de la carrera de Inglés de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi desde el quinto hasta el octavo semestre. Esta investigación utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo con una metodología estadística descriptiva. El instrumento para la recolección de datos fue un cuestionario que constó de 4 secciones: datos demográficos, percepción de los estudiantes sobre la expresión oral y escrita académica, desafíos de la expresión escrita académica, abarcando lenguaje, estructura y contenido, por último, la expresión oral académica, abarcando claridad del discurso y calidad de voz, corrección del lenguaje e interacción con la audiencia. La población de este estudio fueron 46 estudiantes. Los datos se analizaron con los programas SPSS y Excel. Los resultados de esta investigación mostraron que en la escritura académica y en la expresión oral los retos que tienen los estudiantes son en cuanto al lenguaje y la claridad del discurso y la calidad de la voz. Además, se encontró una interconexión entre el contenido de la escritura académica y la claridad del discurso y la calidad de la

voz, la corrección del lenguaje y la interacción con la audiencia. En conclusión, esta investigación identificó retos en la escritura académica (contenido, estructura y uso del lenguaje) y en la expresión oral académica (claridad del discurso y calidad de la voz, corrección del lenguaje e interacción con la audiencia). Estos retos ponen de relieve el papel crucial de una comunicación clara en el proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** Comunicación; Desafíos; Habla; Habilidades Productivas; Interacción Lingüística.

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English major students have a lot of challenges for language learning, particularly in academic writing and speaking skills. Thus, according to Bodiongan et al.<sup>(1)</sup>, students suffer various challenges in their academic life in both academic writing and speaking involving several aspects, as of “for participants, the most difficult experiences they faced in language studies were three: unstable internet connection, poor English proficiency, and low self-confidence”. Similarly, Noori<sup>(2)</sup> highlights those students majoring in English had difficulties when writing, thus, the author reported that academic writing is a very important skill that university students majoring in English need to master; nonetheless, it is a difficult skill to acquire as it needs formal instruction to editing and revising the composition. Aside from academic writing challenges, speaking as a productive skill faces challenges, too. In this way, Jaya<sup>(3)</sup> highlights that learners might face difficulties when producing the target language, which, in many cases, derive to academic issues that impact on their professional lives. These academic issues involve, affective problems including attitude, self-confidence, motivation, and language problems namely vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and pronunciation.

The latter, grammar and vocabulary are ones of the linguistic components essential to learn and master academic writing standards and conventions of the target language.<sup>(4,5)</sup> In this way, knowing the writing standards and conventions in English allow learners to produce accurate texts. However, acquiring the ability to express ideas academically is not easy at all, it requires managing the rhetorical organization and style use across discourses.<sup>(6,7)</sup> That is the reason why some students face challenges such as not having sufficient grammatical knowledge or not knowing how to differentiate the types of genres that academic writing has.<sup>(8)</sup> Noori<sup>(2)</sup> states that “most of the students still find this skill difficult as they struggle to produce high quality and academically verified compositions”. Such a lack of understanding can lead to difficulties in structuring their essays appropriately, using the correct tone and style, and effectively conveying their arguments. Consequently, these students may struggle to meet the expectations of academic standards (e.g., rhetoric and style, purpose and organization), which can impact the way of transmitting the intended message and overall, their academic performance. Academic writing is characterized by being focused, impartial, open-minded, objective, precise, clear, engaging, thorough, and adherent to the conventions of its specific discipline.<sup>(9)</sup> Therefore, writing academically is a complex process that fosters critical thinking, ensures the credibility of research, facilitates structure, and contributes to the ongoing dialogue and development within various fields of study.<sup>(5)</sup> To put it in another way, language is at the heart of accurate writing to disseminate knowledge effectively.

Apart from academic writing, academic speaking, the formal and structured manner of verbal communication used in academic settings seems to be the most challenging skill. That is why language learners find challenges related to the confidence and fluency when participating in communicative activities within speech communities.<sup>(10)</sup> From the above, it is crucial that individuals learning English enhance their linguistic competence, so they must identify their difficulties in oral communication,<sup>(11)</sup> and potentialized them through practice active listening to expand their vocabulary and understand how words are used in context. Such a practice helps learners to become more effective users of the language by having the ability to retrieve words and produce clear structure in mind for what they want to communicate. That is, listening develops a natural *pronunciation and intonation* that enhance learners’ spoken language skills.<sup>(12,13)</sup> While listening improves fluency and pronunciation, academic speaking engagements can simultaneously enhance and refine written work through the feedback and interaction they generate.<sup>(14,10)</sup> In essence, language skills rely on each other in the process of learning a language. For instance, academic writing and speaking are closely interwoven, as both are essential components of scholarly communication. Writing provides a foundation for speaking, ensuring that presentations are well-researched and structured.<sup>(4)</sup> In contrast, speaking activities can improve and polish written materials by incorporating feedback and interactions.<sup>(15)</sup> On this basis, writing and speaking is crucial for the effective dissemination of academic knowledge and the advancement of scholarly discourse. Thus, the primary goal of this research is to identify the difficulties or challenges students majoring in English face when using English in both oral and written forms. The following research questions attempt to address the main objective:

What are the challenges that most affect English learners in academic writing?

What are the challenges that most affect English learners in academic speaking?

## Literature Review

### *Academic Writing and Speaking*

Academic writing, as defined by Oshima and Hogue,<sup>(4)</sup> features a formal tone, clear structure, and adherence to rules. Its primary aim is to present information objectively, supported by references and quotations, commonly found in academic settings like universities and research institutions across various fields, including science, technology, medicine, and the humanities. Thus, clarity and readability are crucial in academic publications and publication submissions, the latter, readability ensures that the text is accessible, engaging, and effectively understood by its intended audience. That is, academic written texts should be accurate in terms of content and structure,<sup>(16)</sup> as they are often addressed for a diverse target audience with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.<sup>(17)</sup> Examining academic writing, Mungen<sup>(18)</sup> analyzed lexical richness and vocabulary in masters' thesis from various disciplines. Mungen found that the vocabulary displayed along with the texts is distinct and diverse from one another and, consequently, there was lexical variation throughout the sub-corpora, particularly between texts related to social sciences and natural sciences. In the same vein, Noori<sup>(2)</sup> analyzed academic writing challenges among 121 undergraduate English majors at Kabul University, addressing difficulties in writing. The author observed that students face challenges in language (vocabulary and grammar), structure (style and organization), and content (genres, conclusions, sources) when writing academically.

Unlike writing, which is developed and polished later, our initial interactions with others commonly happen through speech. The latter, oral communication is essential for building new relationships, exchanging cultural experiences, and enhancing career opportunities, as well. Regarding the impact of vocabulary in speech, a study conducted by Khan et al.<sup>(19)</sup> identified the lack of vocabulary knowledge as a key factor limiting students' ability to speak English. In this way, August et al.<sup>(20)</sup> state that foreign language learners with limited vocabulary take longer to learn new words and struggle with text comprehension and oral communication with their peers. Among various challenges in learners' productive skills, Hamad<sup>(21)</sup> recognizes that vocabulary is a major issue that affects the oral performance of EFL learners. Thus, investigating learners' difficulties in oral presentations, Tareen et al.<sup>(22)</sup> discovered that learners struggled with oral fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, in addition to feeling anxious when being watched, they feared peer assessment and had low self-confidence. Enein<sup>(11)</sup> highlights that in academic oral presentations, students are required to demonstrate their academic progress on university-related topics. However, challenges such as hesitancy and pronunciation, as stated above, can hinder effective verbal expression, leading to feelings of inadequacy.<sup>(23)</sup> Therefore, for EFL speakers to master linguistic production, classroom interventions are essential to improve their communication skills<sup>(24)</sup> and effectively transfer knowledge in spoken or written ways<sup>(25)</sup> in the target language.

### *Characteristics of Academic Writing and Speaking*

Academic writing, according to Oshima and Hogue,<sup>(4)</sup> is characterized by formality, clarity, evidence-based arguments, proper citation, objectivity, adherence to style guides, and critical thinking. It emphasizes avoiding colloquial language, ensuring logical presentation of ideas, supporting arguments with evidence, citing sources correctly, maintaining objectivity, and engaging in critical analysis. On the other hand, speaking as an act of verbal communication encompasses articulating sounds, as well as the appropriate use of vocabulary and grammar rules to understand social context and engage with the audience. Concerning the types of oral expression, Riadil<sup>(26)</sup> presents a classification of oral expression into five fundamental types: (1) *imitative* consists of reproducing words or phrases, (2) *intensive* shows mastery of specific linguistic aspects, (3) *receptive* involves limited interactions, such as greetings and small talk, (4) *interactive* involves more complex exchanges, and (4) *extensive* such as speeches and presentations, limits interaction with the listener and emphasizes the monologue. From this context, it is stated that both writing and speaking comprise the use of language to convey ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Writing and speaking are intertwined as both share similar cognitive processes like planning, organizing, and revising ideas before expressing them in written or spoken form. Therefore, whether in writing or speaking, ideas must be organized logically to make the text coherent and easy to follow, ensuring the audience or reader understands the intended message.<sup>(27)</sup>

### *Genres in Academic Writing*

Academic writing encompasses a variety of genres, such as responses to readings, book reviews, literature reviews, argumentative essays, empirical research articles, and grant proposals.<sup>(28)</sup> Each genre responds to distinct objectives and targets specific audiences, such as academics, researchers, and funding agencies. For example, a literature review provides an overview of existing research, while an argumentative essay explores and analyzes a specific topic. These genres respond to a variety of writing styles and objectives in academia. Although each genre of academic writing has its own conventions and expectations, they all emphasize in the.<sup>(27)</sup> In essence, language users (e.g., writers, speakers, lectures, student writers) need to understand the rhetorical situation they find themselves in and choose the linguistic features that best achieve their purpose and best suit their target audience.<sup>(27)</sup> In order to meet genres and conventions in academic writing, there are

some essential points to consider. Thus, according to Caplan and Johns,<sup>(5)</sup> information from co-sources should be incorporated, emphasizing ethical practices, such as citing correctly, and understanding the differences between citing, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Additionally, it is essential to maintain consistency in tone and integrate the cited content seamlessly. To put it in another way, contextualizing sources provides clarity, while combining information from multiple sources ensures originality and avoids plagiarism. In fact, accuracy and completeness of citations increase the effectiveness of academic writing by engaging readers with clear, well-researched communication.

Regarding Organization in academic writing, Bailey<sup>(29)</sup> acknowledges it in five key stages: planning, organizing paragraphs, structuring the main body, re-reading and re-writing, and final editing and proof-reading. For instance, during *planning*, idea generation, research, and creating an outline are crucial. *Organizing paragraphs* involves writing in a logical progression with sentence clarity. *Developing the main body* requires clear introductions, supporting evidence, and conclusive summaries. *Re-reading and re-writing* aim to improve coherence and clarity by introducing substantive changes. Final *editing and proof-reading* ensure error-free content for presentation. Cai<sup>(30)</sup> states that “reviewing and critiquing are perceived as the most difficult general academic writing skills, while using proper academic phrases and style are the most difficult language-related problems”. These stages are important because they provide a structured approach to the writing process, encouraging clarity, organization, efficiency, and continuous improvement. From the above, Bailey,<sup>(29)</sup> Caplan and Johns,<sup>(5)</sup> and Fang<sup>(28)</sup> conclude that a clear, organized structure aids comprehension, adherence to linguistic rules ensures correctness, and adapting the structure to the audience enhances interaction in both writing and speaking.

### *Clarity and Effectiveness in Academic Writing and Speaking*

Provide concise guidelines for clear and coherent writing, covering elementary rules of usage, principles of composition, and stylistic approaches. These include rules for punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph organization, use of the active voice, and clarity of expression. Following these guidelines improves the readability and effectiveness of written communication by promoting a clear and engaging writing style. Likewise, Orwell<sup>(31)</sup> advocates the use of clear and precise language as an essential tool to foster critical thinking. Orwell argues that the use of set phrases and clichés generates confusion and the weakening of critical thinking. Therefore, attention to language grammar, word choice and adaptation to context are crucial factors for effective communication. Similarly, in academic speaking, clarity, as explored by Cendra and Sulindra,<sup>(32)</sup> is crucial for accurate verbal expression, encompassing factors such as pronunciation, diction, and grammar. Fluency or effectiveness, similarly emphasized, is a must for ESL/EFL learners to navigate academic discourse, enabling fluent articulation of ideas. Cendra and Sulindra Difficulties in learning academic speech and clarity in verbal expression underline that language proficiency, combining accuracy and fluency, is crucial for clear and effective academic communication, enhancing understanding and engagement in scholarly discourse.

When analyzing challenges in speech and clarity in verbal expression, Saragih<sup>(33)</sup> underscores the trials that EFL and ESL learners face in mastering it. This is because, as stated above, an effective communication in English demands proficiency in various aspects such as vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar. Ofiaz<sup>(34)</sup> further explores the complexities of acquiring speaking skills, stressing the importance of communicative contexts and factors like grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, speaking anxiety, and shyness in language proficiency development. Despite these hurdles, mastering English offers opportunities for cultural exchange and professional growth.

In academic speaking, clarity and precision are paramount for effective communication, fostering understanding and engagement among peers and audiences. Millar<sup>(15)</sup> highlights the importance of clarity norms, which interact with discourse conventions and standards, emphasizing its integral role in communication contexts. However, achieving clarity in verbal expression is challenging, as Anjaniputra<sup>(35)</sup> notes that comprehension difficulties can arise from various factors such as laziness or misguided attempts at profundity. Such seminal generalities account for that clarity in writing and oral expression is imperative for English learners to effectively engage with diverse viewpoints and contribute to academic discourse.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

As the current research study attempts to identify the challenges or difficulties English language learners faced in productive skills, it used a quantitative approach. Since a quantitative research approach, according to Creswell<sup>(36)</sup> involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to answer research questions or test hypotheses, a survey-questionnaire was deemed suitable to carry forward this research work. This study employed a descriptive statistical methodology since it studies individuals, events, or conditions in their natural state without manipulating variables, emphasizing the sample and the variables.<sup>(37,38,39)</sup> That is, it provided a detailed analysis of the situation, in this case, the challenges EFL students encounter when developing productive skills.

This study was conducted in the period of October 2023 to March 2024, in students majoring in English at

Technical University of Cotopaxi. The population in the present study was 46 students. It used a probability sampling and a cluster strategy to select participants. Male (15) and female (31) students from the fifth to eighth semester were chosen for their involvement in pre-service teaching (and research) activities requiring strong writing and academic speaking skills, as shown in table 1, below.

Characteristic		Frequency	Percent
Age	17-21	19	41,3 %
	22-26	22	47,8 %
	27+	5	10,9 %
Gender	Female	31	67,4 %
	Male	15	32,6 %
Year of Study	5 semester	23	50,0 %
	6 semester	10	21,7 %
	7 semester	5	10,9 %
	8 semester	8	17,4 %

### Instruments

The primary tool for collecting quantitative data in this research was a questionnaire originally developed by Noori<sup>(2)</sup> for academic writing and Enein<sup>(11)</sup> for academic speaking with minor adjustments made to fit the purpose and context of the present study. The instrument comprised 61 questions categorized in 4 sections. The first section gathered demographic data, the second focused on students' perceptions of academic speaking and writing. The third section explored challenges in academic writing, covering language, structure, and content. The fourth section delved into academic speaking, speech clarity and voice quality, language correctness and audience interaction. Participants were asked to respond on a linear Likert scale (from 1 to 5), with 1 indicating no difficulty and 5 indicating significant difficulty.

### Data Collection and Ethical Issues

Following Kirk,<sup>(40)</sup> who highlights that ethical considerations are crucial in social research, including education, in this study, researchers collected data through questionnaires after obtaining permission from the head of English Department and from participants. Researchers explained the research purpose to participants, assuring them that the questionnaire was solely for research purposes, allowing participants to provide their views freely without feeling judged. The questionnaire was created in Google forms and there was no time limit for completing it.

### Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data in the study was analyzed using SPSS and Excel software programs to answer the research questions, focusing on descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics (independent sample t-tests). For qualitative data, the researchers followed Miles and Huberman's<sup>(41)</sup> approach, as of *data reduction* (summarizing and coding), *data display*, and *conclusion drawing and verification*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section present results obtained writing and speaking divided un six sub-categories as of content, structure, and language, as well as clarity, correctness, and interaction.

Category	Coding	Frequency	Percent
Importance of Academic Writing	Extremely important	28	60,9 %
	Important	17	37,0 %
	Somewhat Important	1	2,2 %
Importance of Academic Speaking	Extremely important	30	65,2 %
	Important	16	34,8 %
	Somewhat Important	0	0,00 %

Table 2 shows the importance of academic writing and speaking from the students' perception. Thus, 60,9 %

of surveyed reported that academic writing is extremely important, in the same way, 37,0 % of them indicated that it is important and only 2,2 % pointed out that academic writing is somewhat important. On the other hand, academic speaking is considered extremely important with 65,2 % while 34,8 % saying highlighted that this skill is important.

**Table 3.** Academic writing challenges: language, structure, and content

Category	Mean	St. Deviation
Challenges in terms of Language	2,89	0,955
Challenges in terms of Structure	2,83	1,000
Challenges in terms of Content	2,68	0,083

Table 3 presents a general overview of the writing subcategories; it was found that the challenges in terms of language have the highest mean value ( $M=2,89$ ). As well as challenges in terms of structure and content reported a mean value of  $M= 2,83$ , and  $M= 2,68$ , respectively. The first research question in this study sought to determine the challenges that most affect English students in academic writing. From the data in table 3, it was found that the use of language is the most affected challenges in academic writing ( $M=2,89$ ). Although data in table 2 above reported that students perceive academic writing as a crucial subject, most of them announced facing some difficulties when using target language. This result relates to those of Noori (2020) who found out similar tendencies in academic writing. As shown in table 3 above students have greater difficulties in academic writing in terms of language ( $M=2,89$ ) and structure ( $M=2,83$ ). In the same research line Cai<sup>(30)</sup> investigating students' difficulties to write academically, observed that learners of the target language experienced greater difficulties in writing in terms of structure, content, and language.

**Table 4.** Academic Speaking challenges: speech clarity and voice quality, language correctness, and audience interaction

Category	Mean	St. Deviation
Speech clarity and voice quality	2,83	0,094
Language correctness	2,82	0,085
Audience interaction	2,81	0,074

Table 4 illustrates the summary statistics for speaking subcategories in which it was found that the challenge in clarity of speech and voice quality has the highest mean value of 2,83; followed by the challenge in correctness of language with a mean value of 2,82, and finally the challenge in interaction with audience with a mean figure of 2,81. The second research question in this study attempted to determine the challenges that most affect English students in academic speaking. From the data analyzed, it was found that the challenges that most affected students in speaking were clarity of speech and voice quality ( $M=2,83$ ). Although data in table 2 above reported that students perceive academic speaking as a crucial subject, most of them announced facing some difficulties when they use the target language in oral presentations. As shown in table 4 above students indicated having difficulties in academic speaking in clarity of speech ( $M=2,83$ ) and voice quality ( $M=2,82$ ).

**Table 5.** Comparison between categories speaking and writing

Writing			Speaking			t	p
Sub-Category	Mean	SD	Sub-Category	Mean	SD		
Content	2,683	0,955	Clarity	2,830	0,094	-3,478	0,003
Structure	2,834	1,00	Correctness	2,820	0,085	0,144	0,444
Language	2,887	0,083	Interaction	2,810	0,074	1,471	0,101

Table 5 presents a comparison of the subcategories of writing; content, structure and language with the subcategories of speaking; clarity, correctness and interaction, showing a variation in each of the comparisons. According to the values presented in the table, content does influence clarity ( $t= -3,4780$ ,  $p= ,003 < ,05$ ), structure does not influence correctness ( $t= 0,144$ ,  $p= ,444 > ,05$ ) and interaction ( $t=1,471$ ,  $p= ,101 > ,05$ ). Table 5 highlights the role of content in communication, influencing clarity in both written and spoken forms.

Contrastingly, structure does not affect correctness, as noted by Newman,<sup>(42)</sup> who emphasizes people's tendency to feel secure using formal language recommended by authorities. This may lead to negative judgments of others' speech, irrespective of validity. The last result highlights that language has no significant impact on interaction. Thus, Al-Roomy<sup>(43)</sup> reported the connection between speech and writing, identifying four phases for effective writing instruction (e.g., preparation, consolidation, differentiation, and integration). As a result, this research provides insights into communication dynamics, benefiting educators and practitioners.

**Table 6.** Comparison of content subcategory with clarity, correctness, and interaction

Writing			Speaking			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Sub-Category	Mean	SD	Sub-Category	Mean	SD		
Content	2,683	0,955	Clarity	2,830	0,094	-3,478	,003
			Correctness	2,820	0,085	-2,389	,020
			Interaction	2,810	0,074	-2,370	,023

Table 6 provides a comparison of the subcategory of content with the subcategories of speaking, which shows a variation between sub-categories. According to the mean values reported in the table above, content influences clarity ( $t = -3,4780$ ,  $p = ,003 < ,05$ ), as well content has an effect on linguistic correctness ( $t = -2,389$ ,  $p = ,020 < ,05$ ) and finally content also impacts interaction ( $t = -2,370$ ,  $p = ,023 < ,05$ ). What stands out in table 6 above was significant relevance found between the content of writing and clarity of speech ( $t = -3,4780$ ,  $p = ,003 < ,05$ ), correctness of language ( $t = -2,389$ ,  $p = ,020 < ,05$ ) and interaction with the audience ( $t = -2,370$ ,  $p = ,023 < ,05$ ). These results have an important interwoven among them as mentioned by Orwell,<sup>(31)</sup> who highlighted that vague thinking and confident expression are intertwined because language must be clear, concise, and honest to avoid manipulation of ideas and distortion of the truth. He also argued that clear writing reflects clear thinking and that the use of language is essential for both writing and oral discourse. Similarly, mention the importance of clarity in writing, as stated above in the literature review. They offer practical advice on how to express ideas coherently and effectively, resulting in clear communication in both writing and speaking.

**Table 7.** Comparison of structure subcategory with clarity, correctness, and interaction

Writing			Speaking			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Sub-Category	Mean	SD	Sub-Category	Mean	SD		
Structure	2,834	1,00	Clarity	2,830	,094	,091	,465
			Correctness	2,820	,085	,144	,444
			Interaction	2,810	,074	,168	,435

The table above (7) illustrates non-significant variations. For example, there was not influence between structure and clarity, and structure between correctness and interaction. From the data above the comparisons can be seen are structure-clarity ( $t = 0,091$ ,  $p = ,465 > ,05$ ) structure-correctness ( $t = 0,144$ ,  $p = ,444 > ,05$ ) and structure-interaction ( $t = 0,168$ ,  $p = ,435 > ,05$ ) show any significance.

**Table 8.** Comparison of language subcategory with clarity, correctness, and interaction

Writing			Speaking			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Sub-Category	Mean	SD	Sub-Category	Mean	SD		
Language	2,887	0,034	Clarity	2,830	0,094	1,104	,160
			Correctness	2,820	0,085	1,514	,095
			Interaction	2,810	0,074	1,471	,101

The data obtained from table 8 set out non-significant variations among sub-categories. As shown in table above, the comparison between language- clarity ( $t = 1,104$ ,  $p = ,160 > ,05$ ) language- correctness ( $t = 1,514$ ,  $p = ,095 > ,05$ ) and language-interaction ( $t = 1,471$ ,  $p = ,101 > ,05$ ) indicated no statistical significance between language and clarity, correctness, and interaction. Furthermore, Bailey (2003), Caplan and Johns (2023), and (Fang 2021) suggest that structure in writing is linked to clarity, correctness, and effective interaction with the audience. However, in the present study, this claim could not be demonstrated as table 7 shown any significance between such a relationship. It is because structure - clarity ( $t = 0,091$ ,  $p = ,465 > ,05$ ), structure

- correctness ( $t = 0,144$ ,  $p = ,444 > ,05$ ), and structure - interaction ( $t = 0,168$ ,  $p = ,435 > ,05$ ), reported higher values at the level of significance ( $,05$ ). Similarly, there was not statistically significance between language - clarity ( $t = 1,104$ ,  $p = ,160 > ,05$ ), language - correctness ( $t = 1,514$ ,  $p = 0,095 > ,05$ ), language-interaction ( $t = 1,471$ ,  $p = ,101 > ,05$ ). These mean values obtained are not significant enough as table 8 shown to demonstrate the relationship of language in writing to clarity, correctness, and audience interaction. As suggested in the literary review done by Fang,<sup>(28)</sup> Orwell,<sup>(31)</sup> attention to grammar, word choice, and adaptation to context are crucial factors for effective communication.

Table 9. Multi-comparison of subcategories in writing						
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	t P
Content	2,683	0,955	Structure	2,834	1,000	-2,997 ,008
			Language	2,887	0,083	-3,515 ,009
Structure	2,834	1,00	Language	2,887	0,083	0,282 ,394
			Content	2,683	0,955	1,798 ,053

Table 9 shows the subcategories of writing compared between them, the results obtained were that content does influence structure ( $t = -2,997$ ,  $p = ,008 < ,05$ ) and language ( $t = -3,515$ ,  $p = ,009 < ,05$ ), structure does not influence language ( $t = -0,282$ ,  $p = ,394 > ,05$ ) but does influence content ( $t = -1,798$ ,  $p = ,053 < ,05$ ) and finally, language does influence content ( $t = -3,515$ ,  $p = ,009 < ,05$ ) but does not influence structure ( $t = -0,282$ ,  $p = ,394 > ,05$ ). The results comparing sub-categories of writing indicated that content (e.g., number and gender) influences in the structure (e.g., organization the ideas) and language use (e.g., grammatical knowledge) when writing academically. This research finding might be the lack of knowledge about how to write academically in English. In this vein, the result observed by Bae et al.<sup>(44)</sup> state that novice writers do not randomly organize words; rather, they adhere to grammatical and discourse regulations to ensure the coherence of a text. Therefore, the utilization of words, grammar, and discourse conventions (including writing standards and community practices) is appropriate to improve the presentation of content. This could be because novice authors use grammatical and discourse rules to organize words cohesively, highlighting the interdependence of structure and language to write effectively. Structure somehow influences language and affects content. It is because, to some extent, content and language may appear conflicting instead of mutually supportive.<sup>(34)</sup> Finally, these findings underscore the significance of understanding and applying grammatical and discourse regulations, as well as writing conventions, to enhance content presentation in academic writing. The interplay between structure and language, while occasionally presenting conflicts, highlights the nuanced balance required for effective written expression.

Table 10. Multi-comparison of subcategories in speaking						
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	t p
Clarity	2,830	0,094	Correctness	2,820	0,085	0,429 0,339
			Interaction	2,810	0,074	0,696 0,253
Correctness	2,820	0,085	Interaction	2,810	0,074	0,242 0,407
			Clarity	2,830	0,094	-0,429 0,339
Interaction	2,810	0,074	Correctness	2,820	0,085	-0,242 0,407
			Clarity	2,830	0,094	-0,696 0,253

Table 10 presents a summary of the statistics for the subcategories in speaking, highlighting a comparison between them and it was found out that clarity does not influence correctness ( $t = -0,429$ ,  $p = ,339 > ,05$ ) and neither interaction ( $t = -0,696$ ,  $p = ,253 > ,05$ ), correctness has also no influence in interaction ( $t = -0,242$ ,  $p = ,407 > ,05$ ) and clarity ( $t = -0,429$ ,  $p = ,339 > ,05$ ), lastly, interaction does not influence correctness ( $t = -0,242$ ,  $p = ,407 > ,05$ ) and clarity ( $t = -0,696$ ,  $p = ,253 > ,05$ ). Regarding the multi-comparison about speaking sub-categories, it was found that clarity (e.g., speech and confidence in oral presentations), does not directly affect correctness and interaction (e.g., language and gestures). While some learner's perspectives oversimplify this relationship, that is, effective communication intricately involves clarity impacting both accuracy and interaction. This is aligned with Newman's<sup>(42)</sup> assertion who argues that understanding language correctness requires clarification for basic writers. Additionally, the findings indicate that correctness does not significantly affect interaction and clarity. Moreover, Bailey,<sup>(29)</sup> Caplan, Johns,<sup>(5)</sup> and Fang<sup>(28)</sup> detailed that well-organized work enhances

understanding, and adherence to language rules ensures accuracy in both written and spoken communication, with tailored structure by enhancing audience engagement.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study was designed to investigate the main challenges in productive skills that English major students face at Technical University of Cotopaxi from the fifth to eighth semesters. The main challenges that the students experienced in the academic writing were the next categories; content (e.g., number and gender) influences in the structure (e.g., organization the ideas) and language use (e.g., grammatical knowledge). On the other hand, the main challenge that students faced in academic speaking were in terms of the next categories; clarity of speech and voice quality (e.g., organization of the oral presentation), correctness of language (e.g., grammatical errors, low communicative competence) and interaction with audience (e.g., body language). Thus, these challenges impact on academic speaking and writing as can be seen in Tables 3 and 4. The challenges that most affected the students in academic writing were the challenges in terms of language, proper use of grammar and having a large vocabulary so as not to be repetitive. Moreover, in academic oral expression it was identified that clarity in academic oral expression and voice quality play an important role in the communicative process for students. Since these skills are important to promote good communication according to the academic level that students should be acquiring throughout the English Major. Furthermore, the comparison between the subcategories of writing and speaking showed that the content of writing has an interconnection with the clarity of speech, interacting with the audience, and linguistic correctness. In addition, the multi-comparison of writing showed that the content of writing influences the structure and use of language in English major students. Thus, these interconnections play an important role in language learning as can be seen in Tables 5, 6 and 9.

The theoretical framework suggests that to address the challenges in the productive skills of English majors at the Technical University of Cotopaxi, it is necessary to know essential points in academic writing and speaking. In academic writing, emphasis should be placed on understanding and rectifying content-related issues, such as those related to number and gender, ensuring a coherent organizational structure and perfecting grammatical knowledge. As for academic speaking, it is crucial to focus on improving clarity of speech and voice quality, correctness of language, and effective audience interaction. These challenges, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, highlight the interconnected nature of academic speaking and writing, and underscore the need for specific interventions that simultaneously address both domains to achieve improvement in productive language skills. To overcome challenges in academic writing, students should actively engage in language workshops and diversify reading habits. Additionally, language learning apps can aid individual skill development. In academic speaking, participation in speaking clubs and seeking feedback are key for improving clarity, correctness, and interaction skills. Teachers play a vital role by implementing interactive teaching methods, peer review sessions, and providing individualized feedback that integrate language skills in writing. Regular assessments and a supportive environment for oral presentations enhance students' proficiency in academic speaking.

Based on the revealing results highlighting the interconnections between the subcategories of speaking and writing, it is recommended that strategies be adopted to improve English language learners' speaking and writing. Recognizing the interplay between the content of writing and clarity of speech, audience interaction, and linguistic correctness underscores the need of new tools for skill development. Furthermore, the observed influence of writing content on the structure and language use emphasizes the importance of addressing these aspects concurrently. Therefore, the development of writing content, clarity, interaction, and linguistic correctness for communication will contribute to a more complete and effective language learning experience for English language learner.

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