



## *Bridging The Gap: How Prompt Writing Skills Influence The Quality Of Literature Review Writing In Higher Education*

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Effective academic writing, particularly literature review writing, remains a critical challenge for students in higher education. Recent pedagogical discussions have emphasized the value of prompt writing skills as a means to enhance clarity, structure, and critical engagement in academic texts. This study investigates how prompt writing skills contribute to the quality of literature review writing among postgraduate students. A comprehensive review of existing literature revealed a growing recognition of writing prompts as cognitive and metacognitive tools in academic writing instruction. The study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design involving 120 postgraduate students (62 females and 58 males) from education and social science departments at three public universities in Pakistan. The respondents ranged in age from 23 to 35 years (Mean = 26.4, SD = 2.9). A structured questionnaire assessed two key domains: (1) students' prompt writing skills, and (2) the quality of their literature reviews based on academic criteria such as coherence, synthesis, analytical depth, and citation practices. Descriptive statistics revealed that the mean score for prompt writing skills was  $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ , while the mean score for literature review quality was  $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.61$  (on a 5-point Likert scale). The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between prompt writing skills and literature review writing quality ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that enhanced engagement with prompt-based writing strategies leads to higher academic writing performance. The discussion highlights that students who regularly employed writing prompts demonstrated better organization, stronger critical evaluation of sources, and improved academic tone. The study concludes that structured prompt writing instruction can serve as a transformative pedagogical intervention to improve academic writing proficiency and literature review outcomes in postgraduate education. Recommendations are offered for curriculum designers and educators to embed prompt-based practices in research methodology and writing courses to strengthen scholarly writing.

**Keywords:** Prompt Writing Skills, Literature Review Writing, Academic Writing, Higher Education, Writing Pedagogy, Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Correlation



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is widely recognized as a foundational skill in higher education, serving as a vital medium for articulating knowledge, constructing arguments, and engaging in scholarly discourse. It encompasses a variety of genres, including essays, research papers, theses, and literature reviews—each requiring discipline-specific conventions, critical engagement, and coherent presentation. Among these, literature review writing occupies a central role in the research process, particularly at the postgraduate level. It demands the ability to read extensively, evaluate sources critically, synthesize findings, and develop an informed perspective that aligns with the researcher's inquiry. A well-executed literature review not only demonstrates the student's grasp of the existing knowledge base but also helps in identifying research gaps, formulating research questions, and justifying the significance of a study within a given academic field (Boote & Beile, 2005; Hart, 1998).

Despite its importance, literature review writing remains one of the most challenging academic tasks for postgraduate students. Numerous studies report that students often lack the skills necessary to move beyond mere summarization of sources and struggle to engage in critical analysis, synthesis, and scholarly argumentation (Kwan, 2006; Kamler & Thomson, 2006). Factors contributing to this challenge include inadequate training in academic writing conventions, insufficient reading of model texts, and a lack of explicit instruction on how to construct literature reviews effectively. Moreover, students frequently fail to adopt an academic voice, which undermines the coherence and authority of their writing (Turner, 2005).

These challenges are further exacerbated in non-native English-speaking contexts, such as Pakistan, where students face additional linguistic and cognitive barriers in producing academic texts in English. As English is often a second or foreign language for these students, the task of literature review writing becomes doubly demanding, involving not only the mastery of content but also the complexities of academic language and style (Mahboob, 2009; Ashraf, 2013). Research indicates that in Pakistani universities, while students may have strong content knowledge, their performance in academic writing tasks remains substandard due to limited exposure to formal instruction in writing skills and minimal opportunities for practice and feedback (Shah et al., 2020).

In light of these challenges, there is a pressing need to explore pedagogical strategies that can support students in improving their academic writing, particularly in literature reviews. One such strategy gaining traction is prompt writing—the use of targeted questions or structured cues designed to guide students' thinking during the writing process. Prompt writing has been shown to support cognitive engagement, enhance organization, and stimulate analytical thinking, all of which are essential components of effective literature review writing (Miller et al., 2018; Stein, 2014).

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the role of prompt writing skills in enhancing the quality of literature review writing among postgraduate students in higher education. By focusing on a sample of students from Pakistani universities, the research seeks to examine whether engagement with prompt writing strategies correlates with improved structure, coherence, and critical depth in literature reviews. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and academic writing instructors seeking to develop more effective writing interventions in similar linguistic and educational contexts.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Literature Review Writing in Higher Education

#### 2.1.1 Conceptual Nature of the Literature Review

The literature review is not merely a summary of existing research but a critical, evaluative, and integrative component of academic scholarship (Boote & Beile, 2005). Its primary function is to situate a study within the broader scholarly discourse by synthesizing existing knowledge, evaluating methodological and theoretical trends, and identifying gaps that justify new research. An effective literature review demonstrates the writer's ability to engage critically with sources rather than reproduce information, thereby reflecting academic maturity and disciplinary awareness.

Hart (1998) emphasizes that a high-quality literature review goes beyond reporting findings to reveal relationships among studies, highlight contradictions, and trace the evolution of key concepts within a field. This integrative function is particularly essential in postgraduate research, where students are expected to contribute original insights grounded in a thorough understanding of existing literature.

#### 2.1.2 Cognitive and Analytical Demands

Writing a literature review imposes substantial cognitive and metacognitive demands on students. It requires advanced reading comprehension, critical thinking, synthesis of multiple perspectives, and the ability to construct a coherent scholarly argument (Ridley, 2012). Students must simultaneously evaluate the relevance, credibility, and limitations of sources while maintaining logical flow and academic tone. These higher-order skills are often underdeveloped, especially among novice researchers, leading to fragmented or overly descriptive reviews.

Several studies indicate that postgraduate students struggle to move from summarization to synthesis and critical evaluation (Turner, 2005; Kamler & Thomson, 2006). As a result, literature reviews frequently lack analytical depth, theoretical integration, and a clear authorial voice. This challenge is exacerbated when students are not explicitly taught how to structure and guide their writing processes.

#### 2.1.3 Challenges in Postgraduate Contexts

Empirical evidence suggests that difficulties in literature review writing are particularly acute in contexts where formal academic writing instruction is limited or implicitly assumed rather than explicitly taught (Wingate, 2012). In many higher education systems, students are expected to acquire academic writing skills independently, despite the complexity of the task. This assumption often disadvantages students who are unfamiliar with disciplinary conventions or who lack exposure to scaffolded writing support.

In the Pakistani higher education context, these challenges are further intensified by linguistic and instructional constraints. Mahboob (2009) notes that many postgraduate students are non-native English speakers and receive limited training in academic writing, critical reading, and research-based argumentation. Consequently, literature reviews often remain descriptive, loosely organized, and weak in synthesis, highlighting the need for structured pedagogical interventions.

#### 2.1.4 Need for Structured Writing Support

Given the complexity of literature review writing, scholars increasingly advocate for explicit instructional strategies that scaffold students' writing processes (Hyland, 2004; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Structured approaches—such as guided prompts, analytical frameworks, and reflective writing tasks—can help students navigate the cognitive demands of



reviewing literature. These strategies encourage purposeful reading, focused synthesis, and the development of a coherent scholarly stance.

Within this framework, prompt-based writing has emerged as a promising pedagogical tool that supports organization, critical engagement, and metacognitive awareness. By guiding students through targeted questions and structured tasks, prompts can transform literature review writing from a passive reporting activity into an active, analytical process, thereby addressing many of the challenges identified in postgraduate education.

## 2.2 Prompt Writing Skills as a Pedagogical Intervention

### 2.2.1 Concept and Purpose of Prompt Writing

Prompt writing refers to the deliberate use of structured cues—such as guiding questions, statements, or task-oriented instructions—that direct students' cognitive engagement during the writing process. These prompts are designed to activate higher-order thinking skills, including reflection, evaluation, synthesis, and self-regulation (Chin, 2004). Rather than allowing students to write in an unguided manner, prompts provide a clear intellectual pathway that supports idea generation, organization, and critical reasoning.

From a pedagogical perspective, prompt writing aligns with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize guided discovery and cognitive scaffolding to support learners in managing complex academic tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). By breaking down writing into manageable, purpose-driven components, prompts reduce cognitive overload and help students focus on analytical depth rather than surface-level description.

### 2.2.2 Prompt Writing and Academic Writing Development

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of prompt writing in enhancing academic writing performance. Miller, Mitchell, and Pessoa (2018) found that structured writing prompts significantly improved students' ability to critically engage with academic texts, construct logical arguments, and maintain coherence across paragraphs. Prompts encourage students to make explicit connections between ideas, justify claims with evidence, and articulate their scholarly stance.

In higher education contexts, prompt writing has been successfully implemented across disciplines such as education, psychology, and the social sciences (Stein, 2014; Hermida, 2015). These studies suggest that prompts function not only as instructional tools but also as metacognitive aids that help students monitor their thinking and writing decisions. As a result, students become more intentional and reflective writers, capable of producing academically rigorous texts.

### 2.2.3 Prompt Writing as Cognitive Scaffolding

The role of prompts as cognitive scaffolds has been emphasized in academic writing literature. Williams and Colomb (2003) argue that well-designed prompts guide students from surface-level engagement toward deeper analytical and argumentative writing. By posing targeted questions—such as asking students to compare theoretical perspectives, evaluate methodological strengths, or identify research gaps—prompts foster critical inquiry and intellectual independence.

This scaffolding function is particularly valuable for postgraduate students, who are often expected to demonstrate advanced analytical skills without receiving explicit guidance on how to achieve them. Prompt writing bridges this instructional gap by making expert thinking processes visible and replicable.





#### 2.2.4 Prompt Writing and Literature Review Quality

Despite the documented benefits of prompt writing in general academic contexts, relatively few studies have focused specifically on its impact on literature review writing. Badenhorst et al. (2015) provide important evidence in this regard, demonstrating that genre-specific prompts significantly improved the structural organization, synthesis of sources, and academic voice in postgraduate students' literature reviews. Their findings highlight the potential of prompts to transform literature review writing from a descriptive task into a critically integrative scholarly practice.

Given that literature review writing requires the integration of multiple sources, theoretical perspectives, and research findings, prompt-based instruction offers a practical solution to common student difficulties. Prompts that explicitly target synthesis, comparison, and evaluation can help students develop a coherent narrative and establish a clear research rationale.

#### 2.2.5 Relevance to Postgraduate and EFL Contexts

The pedagogical value of prompt writing is especially pronounced in contexts where students are non-native English speakers and face additional linguistic and academic challenges. In such settings, prompts provide linguistic and cognitive support by clarifying expectations and guiding academic discourse practices (Hyland, 2004). For postgraduate students in Pakistani universities, where formal academic writing instruction is often limited, prompt-based interventions may serve as an effective strategy to enhance scholarly writing competence.

Overall, the literature suggests that prompt writing is a powerful pedagogical intervention that supports cognitive engagement, academic organization, and critical synthesis. Its application to literature review writing represents a promising area for instructional innovation and empirical investigation in higher education.

### 2.3 Research Gap

Despite international research supporting prompt-based writing instruction, there is a scarcity of empirical studies in the South Asian context, especially within Pakistani higher education. Existing literature in Pakistan primarily addresses general academic writing challenges (Ashraf, 2013; Shah et al., 2020), but little attention has been paid to targeted interventions like prompt writing. Furthermore, there is limited quantitative research that measures the impact of prompt writing skills on literature review quality using statistical tools such as Pearson correlation.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how prompt writing skills affect the literature review writing quality of postgraduate students in Pakistan. By providing empirical evidence through a quantitative descriptive approach, the study contributes to the growing discourse on academic writing pedagogy in non-Western higher education contexts.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine the relationship between postgraduate students' prompt writing skills and the quality of their literature review writing. The design was chosen to collect numerical data from a representative sample, enabling statistical analysis and interpretation of trends and correlations. A descriptive approach was appropriate for capturing participants' self-reported writing



practices and perceptions, while a correlational analysis was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between variables.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised postgraduate students (MPhil and MS levels) enrolled in Education and Social Science programs at three public universities in Pakistan. A sample of 120 students was selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that all participants had completed at least one course in academic or research writing and had written a literature review as part of their coursework or thesis.

The demographic profile of the participants included:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants (N = 120)

Demographic Variable	Category / Description	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	62	51.7
	Male	58	48.3
Age (years)	Range	23–35	—
	Mean	26.4	—
	Standard Deviation	2.9	—
Program Level	MPhil	78	65.0
	MS	42	35.0
Language Background	Non-native English speakers	120	100.0

3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed and validated through expert review. The instrument consisted of two sections:

1. **Prompt Writing Skills Scale (PWSS):** 10 items measuring the frequency and quality of using prompts (e.g., analytical questions, thematic cues, reflective starters) during academic writing. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always).
2. **Literature Review Quality Scale (LRQS):** 10 items assessing organization, coherence, critical analysis, synthesis of ideas, and citation accuracy in literature review writing.

The overall reliability of the instrument was confirmed using Cronbach’s Alpha:

- PWSS = 0.87
- LRQS = 0.84

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining permission from department heads and ethical clearance from the university’s research ethics committee, the questionnaires were distributed physically and via email. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. A total of 120 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed to understand the general trends in prompt writing skills and literature review quality. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between the two key variables. Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.01$ .



Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation between Prompt Writing Skills and Literature Review Quality

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (p)
Prompt Writing Skills	3.87	0.56	0.68	< 0.01
Literature Review Writing Quality	3.75	0.61	—	—

3.5.1 Interpretation of Findings/Result

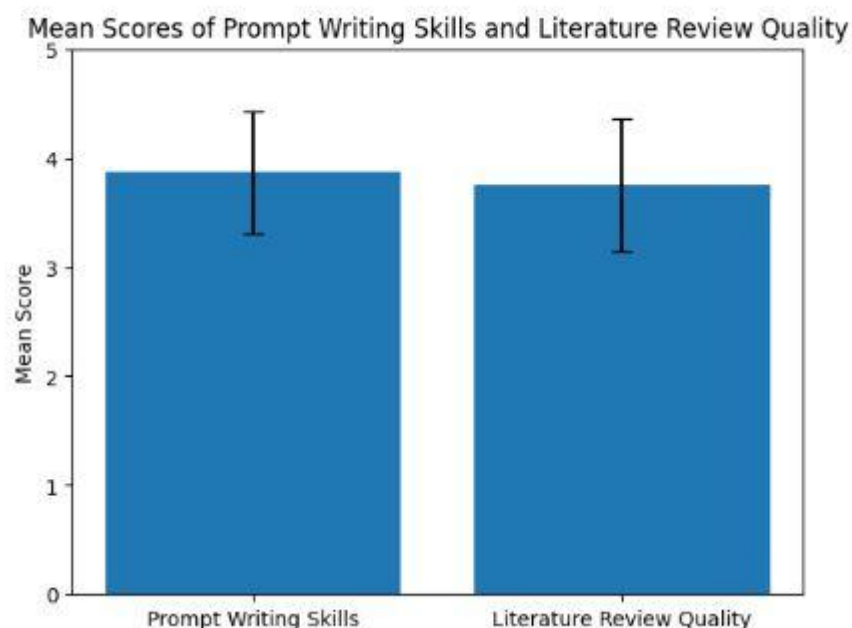
The descriptive statistics indicate that postgraduate students demonstrated a relatively high level of prompt writing skills ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) and a comparably strong quality of literature review writing ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) on a five-point Likert scale. These mean scores suggest that participants generally possessed above-average competence in both constructing effective writing prompts and producing coherent, analytically sound literature reviews. The moderate standard deviations further imply a reasonable level of consistency among students' responses, reflecting shared academic writing experiences across education and social science disciplines.

More importantly, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between prompt writing skills and literature review writing quality ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This finding directly supports the study's objective and aligns with the abstract's premise that prompt writing functions as a cognitive and metacognitive tool in academic writing instruction. The strength of the correlation indicates that students who are more proficient in using writing prompts tend to produce literature reviews that are better structured, more coherent, analytically richer, and more effectively synthesized.

Overall, these results reinforce the argument presented in the abstract that prompt-based writing strategies play a critical role in enhancing academic writing performance at the postgraduate level. The findings suggest that integrating structured prompt writing practices into higher education pedagogy may significantly support students in overcoming common challenges associated with literature review writing, particularly among non-native English speakers in Pakistani universities.



### 3.5.2 Graphical representation of the findings.



The bar graph presents the mean scores of Prompt Writing Skills and Literature Review Writing Quality, with error bars representing their respective standard deviations. The results show that both variables have relatively high mean scores on a five-point Likert scale, indicating a generally strong level of competence among postgraduate students.

Prompt Writing Skills exhibit a slightly higher mean score ( $M = 3.87$ ) compared to Literature Review Writing Quality ( $M = 3.75$ ). This suggests that students perceive themselves as marginally more proficient in using writing prompts than in producing high-quality literature reviews. The presence of moderate error bars ( $SD = 0.56$  for prompt writing skills and  $SD = 0.61$  for literature review quality) indicates some variability in students' responses, yet overall consistency across the sample.

When interpreted alongside the significant Pearson correlation ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ), the graph visually reinforces the quantitative finding that higher prompt writing skills are associated with better literature review writing quality. The close proximity of the mean values implies that improvements in prompt-based writing practices may translate into corresponding gains in literature review performance. Overall, the graph supports the conclusion that prompt writing serves as an effective academic tool for enhancing scholarly writing outcomes at the postgraduate level.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study provide strong empirical support for the growing pedagogical emphasis on prompt writing skills as an effective strategy for enhancing academic writing, particularly literature review writing, at the postgraduate level. The relatively high mean scores for both prompt writing skills ( $M = 3.87$ ) and literature review quality ( $M = 3.75$ ) indicate that participants possessed a moderate to strong command of these competencies. This suggests that postgraduate students who are exposed to or intuitively adopt prompt-based approaches are better positioned to manage the cognitive demands of academic writing, including organization, synthesis, and critical engagement with scholarly sources.





The significant and strong positive correlation between prompt writing skills and literature review writing quality ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ) further reinforces the central premise of the study. This relationship implies that prompt writing is not merely a supplementary technique but a core academic skill that substantially contributes to higher-quality scholarly writing. Students who regularly employed writing prompts demonstrated clearer organization of ideas, more coherent paragraph development, and stronger alignment between research objectives and reviewed literature. These outcomes are consistent with prior research that positions writing prompts as scaffolding tools that support planning, self-regulation, and metacognitive awareness in academic writing.

Moreover, the results highlight that prompt writing facilitates deeper critical evaluation of sources. By guiding students to ask focused, analytical questions during the writing process, prompts encourage evaluative reading, comparative synthesis, and logical integration of multiple studies—key elements of an effective literature review. The improved academic tone observed among students who used structured prompts suggests that such strategies also contribute to greater control over formal language, citation practices, and disciplinary conventions, which are often challenging for non-native English speakers.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings underscore the transformative potential of structured prompt writing instruction in postgraduate education. Incorporating prompt-based writing activities into research methodology and academic writing courses can provide students with explicit guidance on how to approach complex writing tasks systematically. This is particularly relevant in contexts such as Pakistani higher education, where students frequently encounter difficulties in academic writing due to linguistic, instructional, and cognitive challenges.

In conclusion, the study affirms that structured prompt writing instruction serves as a powerful pedagogical intervention capable of improving both academic writing proficiency and literature review outcomes. By fostering organization, critical thinking, and scholarly voice, prompt writing emerges as a practical and evidence-based approach to strengthening postgraduate students' academic writing competence. Future research may build on these findings by examining longitudinal effects of prompt-based instruction and exploring its applicability across disciplines and academic levels.

## 5. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, which demonstrate a strong positive relationship between prompt writing skills and literature review writing quality, several recommendations are proposed for curriculum designers, educators, and academic institutions to enhance postgraduate students' scholarly writing proficiency.

First, curriculum designers are encouraged to systematically embed prompt-based writing practices within research methodology, academic writing, and thesis preparation courses. Structured writing prompts focusing on organization, synthesis of literature, critical evaluation of sources, and citation practices can provide students with cognitive scaffolding, enabling them to approach complex writing tasks more effectively.

Second, educators should integrate regular prompt-driven writing activities into classroom instruction and assessment. Short, guided prompts—such as those targeting argument development, thematic synthesis, and methodological justification—can help students develop clarity, coherence, and analytical depth in their literature reviews.



Continuous use of such prompts may also foster reflective and metacognitive writing habits among postgraduate students.

Third, professional development programs and faculty training workshops should be designed to familiarize instructors with prompt-based pedagogical strategies. Equipping educators with practical frameworks for designing and implementing effective writing prompts will ensure consistent instructional practices and maximize the impact of prompt-based interventions across disciplines.

Fourth, academic support units, such as writing centers and research support offices, should incorporate prompt-based guidance in their mentoring and consultation services. Providing students with structured prompts during individual writing support sessions can further reinforce academic tone, scholarly voice, and effective source integration.

Finally, future research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of prompt-based writing instruction through experimental or longitudinal designs. Investigating its effectiveness across different academic disciplines and proficiency levels may further validate prompt writing as a transformative pedagogical tool in higher education.

Overall, the adoption of structured prompt-based practices has the potential to significantly strengthen postgraduate students' academic writing skills and improve the quality of literature review writing, thereby contributing to enhanced research output and scholarly engagement.

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