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CHALLENGES FACED BY EFL STUDENTS IN WRITING ACADEMIC TEXT

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Abstract: This study aims to identify the challenges faced by EFL students in writing academic texts and the factors contributing to these challenges. This research employed a qualitative descriptive design involving students from the English Education Study Program at Unika St. Ruteng. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students face both linguistic challenges, such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, and non-linguistic challenges, including lack of motivation, writing anxiety, and limited practice. These findings suggest that both language proficiency and psychological factors play significant roles in students' academic writing development.

Keywords: EFL students, academic writing, linguistic challenges, non-linguistic factors, writing anxiety, motivation

INTRODUCTION

Writing academic texts in English is one of the most essential skills for students in higher education, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Academic writing enables students to communicate ideas, construct arguments, and demonstrate critical thinking in academic settings. According to Graham (2019), writing is a complex skill that plays a crucial role in students' academic success, yet it remains one of the most challenging skills for learners to master. This is particularly true for EFL students who must write in a language that is not their first language.

Academic writing requires not only basic language ability but also advanced skills such as organizing ideas, using appropriate academic vocabulary, and following disciplinary conventions. Hyland (2003) emphasizes that effective academic writing depends on both linguistic competence and the understanding of academic discourse. Similarly, Jiang & Kalyuga (2022) states that writing in a foreign language requires the ability to present ideas clearly and logically, which many students still struggle to achieve.

From a theoretical perspective, writing can be understood through process writing theory and genre-based approaches. Process writing theory highlights writing as a recursive activity involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Graham, 2019). Meanwhile, genre-based approaches emphasize that each academic text follows specific structures and conventions that must be learned (Hyland, 2003). These perspectives suggest that writing is not only a linguistic activity but also a cognitive and social process.

Previous studies have investigated the challenges faced by EFL students in academic writing. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) found that students frequently encounter grammatical errors and have limited vocabulary, which negatively affects the clarity and quality of their writing. Similarly, Rahmatunisa (2014) reported that Indonesian EFL students experience difficulties in organizing ideas and maintaining coherence in their essays. In addition, Kurniati & Admojo (2022) revealed that students often struggle with sentence structure and cohesion, which makes their writing less effective. These studies

indicate that linguistic problems remain a major concern in EFL academic writing.

In addition to linguistic difficulties, non-linguistic factors also influence students' writing performance. Psychological aspects such as writing anxiety, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence can hinder students' ability to write effectively. Cheng (2004) found that writing anxiety significantly affects students' performance and willingness to write. Furthermore, Mudra (2023) highlighted that lack of practice and insufficient feedback from lecturers contribute to students' difficulties in academic writing.

In the context of the English Education Study Program at Unika St. Ruteng, students are required to produce academic texts such as essays and research papers in English. However, many students still experience difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, idea organization, and coherence. Therefore, this study aims to identify the challenges faced by EFL students in academic writing. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for improving teaching strategies and supporting students' academic writing development.

METHOD

Research Design and Participants

The study used a descriptive qualitative design. This design focuses on describing and interpreting phenomena related to students' difficulties in writing academic texts. In this study, the researcher described the challenges experienced by EFL students in writing academic text.

The participants of this study consisted of five students from English Education Department at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. They were selected as representatives of EFL students who are currently learning academic writing in English. All participants share a similar academic background and level of study, which helps ensure consistency in the data. They have experience in writing academic texts, making them suitable for providing insights into the challenges faced by EFL students, including both linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties.

Data Collection

The data in this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information about students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in writing academic texts. This type of interview allows flexibility for the researcher to explore participants' responses more deeply. In addition, document analysis was used to examine samples of students' academic writing, such as essays or assignments, in order to identify common writing problems related to grammar, organization, vocabulary, and academic conventions.

Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview. This instrument was designed to collect in-depth information about the challenges faced by EFL students in writing academic texts.

The semi-structured interview was chosen because it allows flexibility for the researcher to explore participants' responses in more detail while still maintaining consistency across all participants. The interview was conducted to five students of the English Education Study Program at Unika Santu Paulus Ruteng. The questions were designed to identify students' challenges. The interview questions used in this study are presented as follows (1) What are the main challenges you face in writing academic texts in English? (2) What linguistic difficulties do you usually encounter (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure)? (3) What non-linguistic factors influence your ability in academic writing? (4) How do you assess your own ability in academic writing? (5) What strategies help you improve your academic writing skills?

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data. The process involved several steps: data familiarization, coding the data, identifying themes, reviewing themes, and interpreting the findings. Through this process, the researcher categorized the challenges faced by EFL

students in academic writing and explained the factors influencing those challenges.

RESULTS

The results related to students' challenges in academic writing were obtained from participants' responses to five open-ended questions. The data analysis revealed several key themes, including general challenges in writing, linguistic difficulties, non-linguistic factors, self-assessment of writing ability, and strategies for improvement. Each theme is described as follows:

1. General Challenges in Academic Writing

The findings showed that students experienced difficulties in organizing ideas, developing arguments, and maintaining coherence in academic texts. Many participants reported that structuring well-developed paragraphs and connecting ideas logically were challenging tasks. Students explained that writing requires careful planning; however, they often struggled to maintain focus from the beginning to the end of their writing. This indicates that they have not fully mastered the structured thinking skills required in academic writing.

In addition, limited understanding of academic text structure, such as introduction, body, and conclusion, further contributes to this issue. One participant stated, *"I find it difficult to organize my ideas into coherent paragraphs and maintain a clear focus throughout my writing."* This response confirms that idea organization and coherence are major challenges affecting students' academic writing quality.

2. Linguistic Difficulties

The results revealed that linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure were major obstacles for students. Most participants reported difficulties in using correct verb tenses, selecting appropriate academic vocabulary, and constructing complex sentences. The participants explained that limited vocabulary made it difficult for them to express ideas precisely and effectively. Grammatical errors, particularly in tenses usage and agreement, often reduced the

clarity of meaning.

Furthermore, their inability to construct complex sentences resulted in writing that tended to be simple and less academic in style. One participant explained, *"I often struggle with grammar, especially verb tenses, and I have limited academic vocabulary."* This indicates that linguistic competence plays a crucial role in determining students' academic writing performance.

3. Non-Linguistic Factors Influencing Writing Ability

The findings showed that non-linguistic factors such as motivation, self-confidence, learning habits, access to learning resources, and time management also influenced students' writing ability. Students reported that low motivation led to limited writing practice, which slowed their progress. Lack of confidence made them afraid of making mistakes and hesitant to express their ideas.

In addition, limited access to academic resources and ineffective time management reduced opportunities to practice and improve their writing skills. One participant stated, *"When I lack confidence, I feel afraid of making mistakes and hesitate to express my ideas."* This suggests that psychological and environmental factors significantly affect students' writing performance.

4. Self-Assessment of Academic Writing Ability

The results indicated that most participants assessed their academic writing ability as being at a basic level. They felt that although they could express general ideas, their writing still lacked clarity, coherence, and proper academic style. Students acknowledged that grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, and weak sentence structures were the main factors affecting the quality of their writing. This awareness reflects a level of self-reflection, although they still require guidance to improve their skills effectively. One participant explained, *"I think my writing is still at a basic level because I struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and organizing my ideas clearly."* This shows that students are aware of their limitations and have potential for improvement.

5. Strategies for Improving Academic Writing Skills

Students reported employing a variety of strategies to enhance their academic writing skills, with regular writing practice emerging as one of the most frequently mentioned approaches. Through continuous practice, students gradually developed greater confidence in expressing ideas and organizing information in a coherent manner. Regular engagement in writing activities allowed them to become more familiar with the structure and conventions of academic texts, including the organization of introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions. In addition, students emphasized the importance of reading academic materials such as journal articles, textbooks, and research papers. Exposure to these texts enabled them to observe effective writing styles, expand their academic vocabulary, and understand how arguments are logically constructed and supported with evidence. As a result, reading served as both a source of knowledge and a model for improving their own writing performance.

Another important strategy highlighted by the participants was seeking feedback from lecturers and peers, followed by revising their written work based on the suggestions received. Students perceived feedback as a valuable learning tool because it helped them identify weaknesses related to grammar, vocabulary choice, sentence structure, and content organization. The revision process encouraged them to reflect critically on their writing and make necessary improvements to enhance clarity and academic quality. One participant explained, *"I try to practice writing regularly and learn from feedback so I can improve my writing."* This statement illustrates the students' awareness that writing development is a gradual process requiring active engagement, continuous practice, and openness to constructive criticism.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that EFL students face various challenges in academic writing, which can be categorized into linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. These findings reinforce the view that writing in a foreign language is a complex activity involving linguistic, cognitive, and affective dimensions.

Regarding general challenges, students experienced difficulties in organizing ideas and maintaining coherence in their writing. This suggests that their structured and critical thinking skills still need improvement. This finding supports Hyland (2019), who argues that effective academic writing requires logical organization of ideas. Similarly, Rahmatunisa (2014) found that Indonesian EFL students often struggle with cohesion and coherence. Limited exposure to academic texts and insufficient writing practice may contribute to these difficulties.

In terms of linguistic challenges, grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure were identified as major obstacles. This supports Fareed et al. (2016), who found that limited language proficiency hinders students' ability to express ideas clearly. Furthermore, students' limited academic vocabulary indicates a lack of familiarity with formal writing conventions (Prasetyaningrum, et al., 2021). This suggests the need for explicit instruction in academic vocabulary and language use in context.

Non-linguistic factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and writing anxiety were also found to significantly influence students' writing performance. Students with low confidence tend to avoid writing activities, which slows their progress. This aligns with Mudra (2023), who states that writing anxiety negatively affects writing quality. In addition, lack of supportive learning environments and poor time management further exacerbate these challenges. Therefore, emotionally supportive teaching approaches are necessary (Kurd et al., 2023).

In terms of self-assessment, students demonstrated awareness of their weaknesses, particularly in grammar and idea organization. This awareness is an important first step in the learning process. However, without proper guidance, students may struggle to improve independently. Therefore, the role of lecturers in providing direction and constructive feedback is essential (Brown, 2014).

The strategies used by students, such as regular practice, reading, and seeking feedback, reflect commonly recommended approaches in writing pedagogy (Mdodana-Zide & Mafugu, 2023). However, these

strategies need to be supported by systematic and continuous teaching methods. Approaches such as process writing, peer review, and constructive feedback can significantly improve students' writing quality. The findings suggest that improving EFL students' academic writing skills requires an integrated approach. It should address not only linguistic competence but also psychological and environmental factors. Therefore, academic writing instruction should be designed comprehensively to support students' overall development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that EFL students encounter multiple challenges in writing academic texts, particularly in terms of linguistic competence and non-linguistic factors. Grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure remain the primary linguistic barriers, while motivation, confidence, and learning environment significantly influence students' writing performance.

These findings imply that improving students' academic writing skills requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both types of challenges. Teachers should not only focus on teaching language rules but also support students' motivation and provide a positive learning environment. Additionally, encouraging the use of effective learning strategies can help students become more independent and confident writers. Future research is recommended to explore more effective teaching methods and strategies that can better support EFL students in developing their academic writing skills.

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