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EFL Students' Difficulties and Strategies in Paragraph Writing at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng

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Abstract

This study examines the difficulties and strategies related to paragraph writing among third semester EFL students of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. Data were gathered from 94 students via an online questionnaire by utilizing a quantitative descriptive survey methodology. The results indicate that students encounter moderate difficulties in grammar ($M = 3.14$), organization ($M = 3.13$), vocabulary ($M = 3.07$), content ($M = 3.03$) and mechanics ($M = 2.51$). Grammatical difficulties encompass difficulties with tenses, singular/plural forms, and sentence structures. Furthermore, students utilized cognitive and metacognitive strategies to resolve these difficulties. Moreover, the predominant strategy is avoidance ($M = 3.69$), categorized as cognitive strategy. Avoidance encompasses the simplification of sentences and vocabulary. Additional cognitive strategies, including resourcing (3.55), verification (3.48), deferral (3.47), retrieval (3.37), and

clarification (3.21) are utilized with moderate to high frequency. However, metacognitive strategies such as planning (M = 3.39), monitoring (M = 3.34), and evaluation (3.29) were employed less frequently. The results indicate that students and instructors should prioritize enhancing students' grammatical abilities, while also promoting the application of metacognitive strategies to improve planning and self-regulation.

Keywords: EFL Students; Paragraph Writing Difficulties; Paragraph Writing Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the fundamental skills in learning English as a foreign language. It plays a crucial role in expressing ideas, thoughts, emotion, and information in written form. Writing requires learners to be imaginative and creative in delivering the message (Hidayati, 2018). Besides that, writing is essential for documenting realities, retaining data, and narrating experiences (Graham et al., 2020). Therefore, mastering writing becomes a necessary skill for EFL students in their academic context.

Furthermore, the fundamental aspect of proficient writing is the composition of paragraphs. A Paragraph composition is essential in writing as it serves as the fundamental unit for constructing longer texts, including essays, articles, or reports. A paragraph can be defined as the collection of closely related sentences that elaborates on a singular concept (Wali & Madani, 2020). Each paragraph aids the reader in comprehending the author's concepts in a more organized manner. Paragraphs enable readers to trace the author's reasoning and argument sequentially. In an academic context, composing a coherent paragraph is a crucial skill that reflects a writer's capacity for critical thinking and clear organization of ideas. In addition, a well-structured paragraph typically consists of a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a

concluding sentence. This structure helps the writer convey ideas coherently while enabling readers to comprehend arguments sequentially (Muhtia et al., 2018).

However, in writing paragraphs, essays, or in general, EFL students face significant difficulties. These difficulties include in the aspect content, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization. Mohammad et al. (2020) found that the common difficulties faced by the college students are incorrectness in using mechanics of writing and lack of clear assessment instruments and marking schemes. Students complained that there is a lack of correct writing mechanisms. They are still confused about using spelling and punctuation correctly and in accordance with language rules. Besides that, Ly et al. (2021) identified that students encounter difficulties in paragraph writing particularly related to grammatical structures, vocabulary, and coherence. These difficulties can impede students' capacity to encode their ideas effectively in writing. This means that, in writing paragraphs, students improper to construct logically, coherent and meaningful writing. Hence, students need to improve their paragraph writing by using related strategies.

In overcoming EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties, students involve effective strategies. Students strategies are the use of method and approach that can resolve their paragraph writing difficulties (Kao & Reynolds, 2017). These strategies are categorized into two types, namely cognitive and metacognitive strategy. Cognitive strategy includes retrieval, resourcing, deferral, avoidance, verification, and clarification. Meanwhile, metacognitive strategy includes planning, monitoring, and evaluation. In addition, Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) explained that in overcoming students' paragraph writing difficulties, they consistently employed cognitive strategies, particularly resourcing. Throughout the writing process by frequently consulting sources, students can

internalize new vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and stylistic elements by referring to resources repeatedly. This will enable them to more effectively manage future writing tasks independently.

The previous studies addressed students' difficulties and strategies in paragraph writing and writing in general. However, this study exclusively identified EFL students' difficulties and strategies in paragraph writing of third-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng which aimed at finding out the difficulties and strategies of the third semester students of the English Language Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. Once in the line, this research could be contributing to increase students' aware of their difficulties in writing paragraph, increasing students' strategies, and lecturers' method in teaching paragraph writing course.

METHOD

According to Kowalczyk (2018), in conducting a research the researcher may employ quantitative research method, qualitative research method, and mixed method. In this research, the researcher used quantitative descriptive survey method, because the researcher identified EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties and strategies by using an online survey and described it by using view large of numbers. Quantitative descriptive research systematically delineates characteristics or phenomena using numerical data, enabling researchers to summarize and interpret observable patterns (Noori 2020).

Furthermore, the subject of this research were all the participants who participated in collecting the data, namely the third semester students of the English Language Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng (94 students). The researcher chose

these participants because they have taken paragraph writing course and they are going to take higher level of writing of next semester. Besides that, in collecting the data, the researcher used online questionnaire adapted from Wu (2007). Five levels were used to rank the students' paragraph writing difficulties and strategies, namely 1 for *never*, 2 for *seldom*, 3 for *sometimes*, 4 for *often*, and 5 for *always*. Moreover, the questionnaire's statements regarding paragraph writing difficulties were divided into content aspect, grammar aspect, vocabulary aspect, mechanics aspect, and organization aspect. Lastly, techniques of strategies were divided into two categories by Wenden (1991) in Franco (2012) and Boonyarattanasoonorn (2017), namely cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Both of those categories have sub-strategies: cognitive strategies (clarification, retrieval, resourcing, avoidance, deferral, and verification) and metacognitive strategies (planning, evaluating, and monitoring).

Moreover, in collecting the data, some steps were involved. First, the researcher prepared several questions in the form of a questionnaire adopted from previous related studies. Secondly, the researcher input the questionnaire into Google Forms. Then, the questionnaire that has been entered into Google Forms were distributed to all participants of this research. After that, participants were asked to fill out the prepared questionnaire. Lastly, the researcher collected and store all the data from the participants' questionnaires. In addition, in analyzing the data, the researcher used Excel to calculate the percentage, mean, and frequency of the data by involving some steps. Firstly, the researcher collected the data from students' questionnaire. Secondly, the researcher tabulated the data from the student's answer. After that, the researcher calculated the data. The ranges were as follows: 1.00-1.80= very low, 1.81-2.60= low, 2.61-3.40=

medium, 3.41-4.20= high, 4.21-5.00= very high (Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2017).

RESULT

This section shows the results of the research. The results of this research related to EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties and strategies of the third semester students of the English Language Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. Firstly, EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties. The EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties can be seen in table below.

Table 1. EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties.

Aspects	Percentage	Average Score	Interpretation
Content	20.34%	3.03	Medium
Grammar	21.14%	3.14	Medium
Vocabulary	20.63%	3.07	Medium
Mechanics	16.86%	2.51	Low
Organization	21.04%	3.13	Medium

Table 1. above displays the EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties related to 94 students of the English Language Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. Based on the data, there are five aspects of EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties, namely content (3.03, representing 20.34%), grammar (3.14, representing 21.14%), vocabulary (3.07, representing 20.63%), mechanics (2.51, representing 16.86%), and organization (3.13, representing 21.04%). This data shows that the aspect of content, grammar, vocabulary, and organization are moderate categorized,

meanwhile the aspect of mechanics is low categorized. Moreover, this presents that the aspect of grammar becomes the highest average score and percentage of EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties. This indicates that students are not able to write by using correct structure, because they are still confused about using singular and plural nouns correctly, using parts of speech, constructing ideas with the correct language structure, and often using the wrong tenses in writing.

Secondly, EFL students' strategies in resolving paragraph writing difficulties. The results explained in this session are the strategies used by third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng in overcoming the difficulties they experienced in writing paragraph itself. These results were obtained through an online questionnaire distributed to 94 respondents. Moreover, the strategies used by the students in overcoming their paragraph writing difficulties include retrieval aspect, resourcing aspect, deferral aspect, avoidance aspect, verification aspect, clarification aspect, planning aspect, monitoring aspect, and evaluation aspect. EFL students' strategies in overcoming their paragraph writing difficulties can be seen in table below.

Table 2. EFL students' strategies in overcoming paragraph writing difficulties.

Aspects	Percentage	Average Score	Interpretations
Retrieval	10,93%	3.37	Medium
Resourcing	11.54%	3.55	High
Deferral	11.26%	3.47	High
Avoidance	11.99%	3.69	High
Verification	11.30%	3.48	High
Clarification	10.43%	3.21	Medium

Planning	11.00%	3.39	Medium
Monitoring	10.85%	3.34	Medium
Evaluation	10.69%	3.29	Medium

Table 2. above displays EFL students' strategies in overcoming paragraph writing difficulties related to 94 students of the third semester students of the English Language Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. This data shows that there are nine strategies used by the students to resolve their paragraph writing difficulties. These strategies are divided into two categories, namely cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies include retrieval aspect (3.37, representing 10.93%), resourcing aspect (3.55, representing 11.54%), deferral aspect (3.47, representing 11.26%), avoidance aspect (3.69, representing 11.99%), verification aspect (3.48, representing 11.30%), and clarification aspect (3.21, representing 10.43%). Meanwhile, metacognitive strategies include planning aspect (3.39, representing 11.00%), monitoring aspect (3.34, representing 10.58%), and evaluation aspect (3.29, representing 10.69%).

Furthermore, this table demonstrates that the aspect of resourcing, deferral, avoidance, and verification are high categorized, meanwhile the aspect of retrieval, clarification, planning, monitoring, and evaluation are moderate categorized. Moreover, this data indicates that the predominant strategy used by the students is avoidance with the mean score of 3.69 and percentage of 11.99% (cognitive strategy). In addition, this strategy includes avoiding the use of difficult language and replacing it with different sentences and simpler language. Additionally, when they are unsure about the use of certain language structures, they modify it by using sentences or language that they feel comfortable with. Then, they also use simpler vocabulary to avoid using

more advanced words, making it easier for them to write paragraphs. Meanwhile, the less strategy used by the students is evaluation with the mean score of 3.29 (metacognitive strategy).

Discussion

The results of this study offer a thorough grasp of the difficulties and strategies of the third-semester students of the English Language Study Program when writing paragraphs as well as the strategies they use to get past these difficulties. This discussion displays the presentation of each aspect of students' paragraph writing difficulties and strategies. Besides that, this section explains the results' ramifications, relating them to pertinent theoretical frameworks and earlier studies, and emphasizes how important they are for EFL writing instruction. Moreover, the importance of addressing these difficulties in EFL writing instruction is emphasized by the discussion, which places the findings within the broader context of second language acquisition and composition theory.

The first is EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties. The research result indicates that the aspect of grammar is the highest difficulty experienced by students, with an average score of 3.14 with the presentation of 21.14% (medium category). This difficulty includes the incorrect use of singular and plural forms, the appropriate selection of words according to their parts of speech, and the incorrect use of tenses. Additionally, students may encounter difficulty in comprehending these fundamental grammatical concepts in the absence of sufficient exposure to real-world writing assignments and supervised practice, which could lead to a high number of errors in their writing. This findings are supported

previous research done by Boonyarattanasoontorn, (2017) and Bulqiyah et al. (2021) which also indicate that grammar often poses a major difficulty in English writing. This is because EFL students tend to have difficulty separating their native language thought patterns from English grammar patterns.

Furthermore, lack of experience with sentence structure can make it difficult to choose words according to their parts of speech and apply tenses correctly. These difficulties imply that students might not fully comprehend how words work in context or how to keep a paragraph's grammar consistent. For instance, improper use of tenses frequently indicates a lack of understanding regarding time periods and the verb forms that correspond to them, which can cause their writing to become inconsistent. These results emphasize how crucial it is to provide students with focused grammar instruction, practice, and feedback in order to address their challenges. Students can increase their capacity to write precise, coherent, and understandable paragraphs by improving their knowledge and use of grammar.

Furthermore, the aspect of organization also poses a significant difficulty with an average score of 3.13 with the presentation of 21.04% (moderate category). Difficulties in this aspect include students' inability to organize supporting ideas logically and cohesively to strengthen the main idea of the paragraph. These result suggests that a significant number of students have not yet developed a comprehensive understanding of the significance of the relationships between sentences in a paragraph in order to establish coherence and unity. This is in line with the research by Ly et al. (2021), which found

that EFL students often struggle to construct a logical paragraph structure.

Moreover, from the aspect of vocabulary, students showed an average score of 3.07 with the presentation of 20.63% (moderate category). This difficulty is the second highest presentation of students' difficulties in constructing paragraph. This indicates that students experience limitations in choosing the right words to express their ideas. Besides that, this suggests that students' lexical range and precision are somewhat restricted, despite the fact that they possess a functional vocabulary to express their ideas. This constraint may impede their capacity to effectively communicate more intricate or nuanced concepts, which could affect the overall quality of their paragraphs. This difficulty frequently results from a lack of exposure to a variety of language use contexts or a lack of practice in utilizing newly acquired words. Besides that, students' writing is still influenced by their native language so that it will difficult for them to use correct vocabulary. This result is supported by previous research which done by Alyan, (2022) who investigated the difficulties of EFL students in writing.

Meanwhile, the content and mechanics aspects each received an average score of 3.04 with the presentation of 20,34% (medium category) and 2.507 with the presentation of 16.86% (low category). Difficulties in content are primarily related to a lack of understanding of paragraph writing rules such as topic sentences and supporting ideas. On the other hand, mechanical aspects such as punctuation and spelling are relatively lower

compared to other aspects, but they still require attention to improve the overall quality of students' writing.

In conclusion, this study shows that the aspect of grammar becomes the highest presentation of EFL students' paragraph writing difficulties at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, namely 21.14%. These finding aligns with previous research indicating that grammar and is one of some aspects that often pose challenges for EFL students in writing (Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2017 and Bulqiyah et al. 2021). Additionally, this explains that in the process of writing paragraphs, students still experience difficulties in constructing sentences and paragraphs using the correct sentence structure. This indicates that students still need time to learn the correct and proper language structure so that they will be able to write correctly according to the structure of the English language.

The second is EFL students' strategies in overcoming paragraph writing difficulties. This study also found that students use various strategies to overcome difficulties in writing paragraphs. the results of this study indicate that in overcoming students' difficulties in writing paragraphs, they employ several strategies. The strategies found in this research are based on each student's experience in overcoming their difficulties in writing a paragraph. Furthermore, there are two categorized of EFL students' strategies in resolving their paragraph writing difficulties. These strategies are cognitive strategy and metacognitive strategy. Cognitive strategy involves strategy includes retrieval, resourcing, deferral, avoidance, verification, and clarification. Meanwhile, metacognitive strategy involves planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

The study reveals that the strategies used by third-semester English Language Education Study Program students at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus from the most dominant to the less used by the EFL students. These strategies are explained below. Firstly, avoidance is the most dominant strategy used by the EFL students, with an average score of 3.69, presenting as 11.99% (cognitive strategy). This strategy involves simplifying writing by using simpler language and avoiding complex vocabulary or sentence structures. This strategy may limit students' linguistic development and ability to develop advanced writing skills. Secondly, avoidance with an average score of 3.55, representing 11.54% (cognitive strategy). It involves using dictionaries, grammar books, or other relevant sources to help students understand topics and writing structures. This strategy helps students expand their vocabulary, improve grammar, and fosters confidence in articulating ideas coherently and accurately.

Thirdly, verification strategy. This strategy is cognitive strategy, with an average score of 3.48, representing 11.30%. This strategy involves examining writing for errors in grammar, vocabulary, and structure, as well as cross-referencing with reputable sources to ensure accuracy. This strategy cultivates habits of meticulous revision and self-monitoring essential for long-term success in academic and professional communication.

Furthermore, deferral strategy. This is a metacognitive strategy, with an average score of 3.47, representing 11.26%. Students intentionally delay addressing specific difficulties in writing until they have the necessary time, knowledge, or resources to do so effectively. Retrieval and clarification are medium interpretation strategies, with moderate engagement suggesting an opportunity for further improvement through targeted instruction or practice.

Moreover, metacognitive strategies like planning (3.39;11%), monitoring (3.34;10.85%), and evaluation (3.29;10.69%) are low interpretation, suggesting that students may not always apply these techniques consistently or thoroughly. Explicit teaching of metacognitive techniques, such as setting specific writing objectives, monitoring progress regularly, and critically evaluating work, could help students take more charge of their writing process and develop overall paragraph construction skills.

Based on explanation above, the results of this study provide several important implications for English language teaching, particularly in writing instruction. First, lecturers need to identify the main difficulties experienced by students, especially in the aspects of grammar and organization, to provide more focused guidance. Secondly, the strategies that students have used, such as resourcing and retrieval, can be strengthened through more intensive training to enhance their effectiveness. Third, lecturers need to encourage students to be more active in using metacognitive strategies, such as planning and evaluation, to help them develop independent writing skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results obtained from the subjects of this research, it can be concluded that third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng experience difficulties in constructing a paragraph. These difficulties include aspects of content, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization. Based on the data analysis results, the most dominant difficulty experienced by students is in the aspect of grammar, while the less dominant difficulty is in the aspect of mechanics.

Furthermore, the strategies they use to overcome difficulties in constructing paragraphs are cognitive strategies (clarification, retrieval, resourcing, avoidance, deferral, and verification) and metacognitive strategies (planning, evaluation, and monitoring). Based on the data analysis results in this study, it can be determined that the dominant strategies they used is avoidance. This strategy is classified as cognitive strategy.

Moreover, this research was limited to third-grade students of the English Language Study Program at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, so the generalization of the results is limited to the same subjects. Besides that, this study only used online questionnaire design and involved relatively small subjects of the research. Finally, this can be concluded that, third semester students of the English Language Study Program still have difficulties in constructing paragraph. As the recommendation, lecturers should recognize and understand the difficulties experienced by students in constructing paragraphs and be able to provide effective methods as well as motivate students to improve their paragraph construction skills. In addition, students must be able to recognize the difficulties they face and use appropriate strategies to develop their skills in writing paragraphs and in the process of teaching paragraph writing, the lecturer should recognize and understand the difficulties experienced by students in constructing paragraphs and be able to provide effective methods as well as motivate students to improve their paragraph construction skills.

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