



The Challenges of Writing Academic Article: Voices of Higher Education Students

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Abstract

Academic writing is commonly characterized as scientific writing which is portrayed as an organized research practiced and utilized by researchers at higher education level. The purpose of the study is to investigate the challenges faced by students in the process of writing an academic article. This present study is a qualitative research that explores the voices of three higher education students toward challenges in writing an academic article. The data were analyzed descriptively and were divided into three big themes. The findings showed that the main challenges faced by students during the process of writing an academic article are grammatical structure, paraphrasing and organizing ideas. It is suggested that the teachers' or lectures' roles and support in process of writing is very important in order to build students' motivation..

Keywords:

perception, challenges in writing, academic article

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many universities in Indonesia are assigned their students to publish an academic article to accomplish their degree, especially in higher education. Thus, the students must have a great understanding and adequate knowledge with a larger number of scientific publications including academic journals, research article, or books. According to (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022), academic publications become more crucial for students in higher level of education because it is a must for them to write a research article in order to accomplish their educational degree and certainly contribute to students' development. In fact, many students in private university are still struggling in maintaining this standard.

Academic writing can be defined as mental and cognitive activity since it is a product of mind (Al Fadda, 2012). Additionally, academic writing is written in systematic structure in a formal language (Nenotek et al, 2022). It consistent with (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022; Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020; Alisha, Safitri, Santoso,

& Siliwangi, 2019; Ghararah & Hamzah 1989) who mention academic writing as the logical arrangement and organization of the written sentences within a paragraphs, units of discourse and the expressions of the idea that should be approached in innovative ways of thinking. It simply concluded that academic writing is a complex process. It involves several aspects that believed as the base of the successful of academic writing. In fact, many EFL students in higher level tend to be more struggling in English writing.

Since there are the challenges problems faced by higher education in writing an academic article, (Safitri et al, 2021; Lestari, 2020; Azizah & Budiman, 2015) conducted a research about the challenges faced by graduate students in writing academic papers for international publication. It was found that there are several aspects faced by students in writing an academic article, including a well-structured paragraph, citation, vocabulary, grammar, writing references, and most importantly, a lack of English proficiency. Similarly, (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022; Alfaki's, 2015) study also showed that higher students have several problems in writing including syntax and morphology such as usage errors; and mechanical skills such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Additionally, (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022; Helda, 2018), revealed that higher-level students are still unable to construct ideas about the topic and find it difficult to paraphrase someone else's ideas.

It has become a big issue among university students that a journal publication is a must. It can be used not only as the requirements to accomplish our degree but also to prove our capability in writing that we are a good writer. In fact, writing an academic writing is not as easy as it says. That is why the researcher is interested in conducting this study. Besides it requires some challenges that should be discovered by the researcher, this phenomenon also happens around us. To achieve the purpose of this study, one major research question is: what are students' perception toward the challenges in writing an academic article?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted in qualitative research which explores the voices of higher education students. The study seeks to explore the challenges faced by students of master program in one private University of Indonesia in writing an academic article. Qualitative methods were used to inform a complete understanding of research problems academically. Moreover, Haradhan (2018), states that qualitative method are interested in people's experience, belief, and meaning system from people's perspective. Thus, interview was used as the instrument to gather the information from the participants. Six participants who are pursuing their master's degrees were chosen randomly to help the researcher discover the challenges faced by the students. They were chosen because in Indonesia, master's degree candidates have to publish an academic article to complete their master's degree. However they still face some problems as mentioned in the previous section. This research used a semi-structured interview in order to get in-depth data from participants. Besides, the participants are able to use Bahasa Indonesia during interview.

Furthermore, the analysis was done in order to answer the aim of this research in describing students' voices of the challenges in writing an academic article. The data were analyzed with the following steps: 1) transcribed the data interview, 2)

explained the data interview descriptively and translated it into English, then 3) divided the data into several themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the interview, it was found that there are some challenges encountered by the students in writing an academic article: 1) Grammatical structure, 2) Paraphrasing, and 3) Organizing ideas.

1.1.1. Difficulties in Grammatical Structure

The role of grammar has been a crucial issue for students in writing process relating to writing for academic purposes. Grammar has an important role in academic writing. In fact, many students still have numerous problems in their attempts in writing the second language. Mah & Chow (2013) stated that many students are still committing a grammatical error. This mostly caused by their limited capacity in understanding the grammatical rules, includes the difficulties in using singular and plural nouns, determiner, verbs, and parallelism. In line with this, two of the participants (Jeni and Tiara) agreed that grammatical structure is one of the most challenges factor in writing academic article.

“The biggest problem that I face in writing is the grammatical structure, for example the use of connectors word.” (Jeni)

“Grammar is very important, especially in writing; however, I still struggle to write an academic paper due to my limited grammatical knowledge” (Tiara).

Having the same problem with Jeni and Tiara, Brandon also stated that the main problem in writing academic article is grammatical roles.

“I often confuse to write a sentence with grammatically correct, because it is difficult for me to determine whether it is a correct grammar or not in my sentences”. (Brandon)

1.1.2. Difficulties in Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is the other challenges which appear during the process of writing an academic article (Dyer, 2016). Paraphrasing is the best way to avoid the plagiarism since plagiarism is one of the biggest problems faced by students in writing. By paraphrasing, students can express someone’s ideas or arguments while still maintaining the main ideas or arguments of the original sources through their own words.

“I often confused in how to paraphrase the ideas or arguments from the experts. So, my writing project contains much plagiarism.” (Jeni)

The other participants, Upik and Ani strengthen their opinion by stated that paraphrasing someone’s ideas from the references is very difficult. It simply defined that the way of paraphrasing someone’s ideas or argument will influence the level of plagiarism.

“It is very important in knowing how to paraphrase other’s ideas in academic article to avoid the plagiarism, but in this case, I find myself difficult to paraphrase other’s ideas.”(Upik)

“Based on my opinion, Paraphrasing someone’s idea can affect the quality of my academic article since it help to lower the level of plagiarism. (Ani)

1.1.3. Difficulties in Organizing Ideas

Organizing ideas is another aspects in a good academic writing. Lavelle & Bushrow (2007) highlighted that the experience of academic in the term of synthesizing perspectives, integrating disparate idea, and extending theory request the higher level of construction and perspective skills, as well as greater focus of accuracy, voice, and audience. In fact, many students still faced difficulties in delivering ideas toward their writing. The participants agreed that it is difficult for them to organize their ideas and differentiate a topic and specific details.

“It is difficult for me in structuring the idea from one paragraph to another.” (Upik)

Furthermore, Jeni strengthen her opinion by stated that organizing or ordering idea is more difficult rather than finding the ideas.

“It is hard to write the ideas clearly and orderly. (Jeni)

Another participants, Brandon and Sinta also stated that the most challenges factor in writing is organizing the ideas into a good paragraph.

“I often have several ideas that I would like to deliver in my academic article, but then I am confused how to structure the ideas.” (Brandon)

“What I always face the most when writing an academic article is how to organize my ideas well. This happens every time I have an idea but do not know how to organize it into a good paragraph.” (Sinta)

The data above indicate that all participants agreed if they faced the same challenges in the writing process and those challenges also relate to the previous studies. The findings of this research are in line with previous researches (Pineteh, 2013; Hu, 2016; Azizah & Budiman 2015; Mubarak, 2017; Dyer. 2016; Hirvela & Du, 2013; and Alfaki, 2015) which are discussed about challenges faced by higher education students in writing an academic article. The results of the present research provide the evidence that writing academic article is very challenging.

Grammatical structure is the first problem encountered by students. Coxhead (2012) argues that a proper academic paper must be written in proper English, which are the rules of tenses, punctuations, and other textual aspects. In fact, most of students still struggle with the use of correct grammatical structure (Safitri et al., 2021; Lestari, 2020 ;Azizah & Budiman, 2015). Students are still committing the error grammatical structure that consume a great deal of lecturer’s effort and time in revising students’ written tasks. (Choy & Lee, 2012; Lioo, M & Tseng, 2010; Alfaki, 2015; Mubarak, 2017).

The difficulties in paraphrasing someone’s ideas or arguments is another problem that faced by students in writing an academic article (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022; Helda, 2018; Dyer, 2016; Hirvela & Du 2013; and Choy & Lee 2012). Badiozaman (2014) defines paraphrasing as the activity of restating someone’s ideas or arguments which is expressed by another person and was presented in the new form. In fact, many students are still lack of confidence in paraphrasing someone’s ideas (Lioo & Tseng, 2010). They tend to adapt the original words of the source rather than

rephrasing the ideas. In addition, almost all students in the interview said that the difficulties in paraphrasing someone's ideas will affect their level of plagiarism in their academic writing. They also add that more practicing, looking for additional sources about paraphrasing, and memorizing vocabularies are needed to overcome this problem.

The last problem encountered by students deals with organizing and developing ideas (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022; Alfaki, 2015; Azizah & Budiman 2015; Mubarak, 2017). Undeniable, many students still struggling on how to write a well-organized idea. As Cargill & O'connor (2009) said that many students are difficult in developing and organizing their ideas in an ordered way. In order to overcome this situation, the students are asked to have more practice so that they will finally get the pattern on how to organize ideas (Ghabool et.al., 2012). This is where the teacher or lecturer play his role to guide the students. The previous studies also highlighted these problems as common challenges encountered by students in studying English as a Foreign Language as well as English as a Second Language (Pineteh, 2013; Hu, 2016; Azizah & Budiman 2015; Mubarak, 2017; Dyer. 2016; Hirvela & Du 2013; Alfaki, 2015). They pointed out that students' difficulties in writing derive from the issue that writing is extremely a complex activity. Further, they also argue that a good academic writing contains a good construction including the content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, and punctuation. It simply defined that a writer must be able in organizing and integrating the information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs.

CONCLUSION

A detailed explanation of the challenges that higher education students faced in writing an academic article has been showed in the findings. It showed that grammatical structure, paraphrasing, and organizing ideas are the challenging factors that usually faced by the students during the process of writing. Based on these findings, the research implies numerous suggestions for the lecturers and students. The researcher suggests the lecturer to pay more attention to the materials and how they evaluate their students in order to maintain and stimulate their students' motivation and attitudes to write for academic purposes. For the students, the researcher suggests the students to be aware of the importance of writing an academic article. In this regard, they needed to read a lot of journal articles or books relating to the academic writing, identify an interest issues and topics to make them more sensitive to their surroundings, and more practicing on writing such us blogging. Then, the research also proposes a suggestion for the further research. Since this research reveals the most difficult aspects faced by higher level of students in their writing process, the further research can do deeper investigation on how the students overcome those aspects.

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