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Improving Academic Writing Skills in EFL Contexts among University Students in the Fifth Semester

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Abstrak

Kemampuan menulis akademik merupakan keterampilan penting yang harus dikuasai mahasiswa, khususnya dalam konteks English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa semester lima dalam pengembangan keterampilan menulis akademik serta strategi pengajaran yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan 25 mahasiswa dan 1 dosen pengampu mata kuliah Academic Writing di Institut Pendidikan Nusantara Global. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi kelas, analisis dokumen tulisan mahasiswa, dan jurnal reflektif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menghadapi kesulitan dalam organisasi teks, penggunaan bahasa akademik, integrasi sumber, dan pengelolaan kecemasan menulis. Di sisi lain, strategi seperti scaffolding, umpan balik berkelanjutan, penggunaan teknologi, dan refleksi diri terbukti efektif dalam mendukung perkembangan menulis akademik mahasiswa. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan berbasis proses dan genre dalam pengajaran menulis, serta perlunya dukungan institusional yang berkelanjutan. Dengan menciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran yang suportif dan terstruktur, dosen dapat membantu mahasiswa EFL mengatasi hambatan dalam menulis dan membangun kepercayaan diri mereka sebagai penulis akademik.

Kata Kunci: *Menulis Akademik, Mahasiswa Semester Lima, EFL, Pengajaran Menulis, Strategi Pembelajaran*

Abstract

Academic writing is a crucial skill for university students, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This research aims to explore the challenges encountered by fifth-semester students in developing academic writing competence and to identify effective teaching strategies that support this development. A qualitative case study method was employed, involving 25 students and 1 lecturer from Institut Pendidikan Nusantara Global. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, document analysis of student writing, and reflective journals. The findings revealed that students faced difficulties in organizing texts, using academic language, integrating sources, and managing writing anxiety. On the other hand, instructional strategies such as scaffolding, continuous feedback, technology integration, and reflective practices were found to be effective in fostering students' academic writing skills. The study underscores the importance of adopting process- and genre-based approaches in writing instruction and highlights the need for sustained institutional support. By creating a supportive and structured learning environment, educators can help EFL students overcome writing challenges and build confidence as academic writers.

Keyword: *Academic Writing, Fifth-Semester Students, EFL, Writing Instruction, Learning Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of higher education, academic writing occupies a central role in the development of critical thinking, scholarly expression, and disciplinary knowledge. For university students, especially those studying in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, academic writing is not merely a medium for conveying information; it is a core skill that shapes their ability to succeed in various academic disciplines. As students' progress through their academic journey, the complexity and expectations associated with academic writing tasks increase significantly. By the fifth semester, university students are typically expected to produce more sophisticated written work that demonstrates not only linguistic accuracy but also analytical depth, coherence of ideas, and adherence to academic conventions.

However, numerous studies and classroom observations indicate that many EFL learners continue to struggle with the demands of academic writing well into the middle stages of their undergraduate programs. These difficulties may stem from a range of factors, including limited exposure to academic genres, insufficient mastery of English grammar and vocabulary, lack of familiarity with rhetorical structures, inadequate reading habits, and a general uncertainty about academic norms and expectations. In contexts where English is not the primary medium of instruction or communication, these challenges are

compounded by limited opportunities for authentic language use and academic discourse outside the classroom. As a result, there is a growing need to examine how academic writing skills can be more effectively cultivated among fifth-semester university students in EFL environments.

The fifth semester represents a pivotal moment in a student's academic development. At this stage, learners are expected to transition from basic or intermediate writing tasks—such as summarizing texts or writing short essays—to more advanced forms of academic expression. These may include writing literature reviews, developing argumentative essays with citations, composing research proposals, or engaging in discipline-specific writing tasks. Consequently, the ability to write academically is not only a linguistic concern but also a cognitive and metacognitive process involving planning, organizing, evaluating, and revising one's own work. Despite this, EFL instruction at many institutions remains heavily focused on grammatical accuracy and general language skills, often neglecting the broader academic and rhetorical demands of writing at the university level.

One of the key issues faced by fifth-semester students is a lack of clarity regarding the structure and organization of academic texts. Unlike informal or narrative writing, academic writing adheres to strict conventions that guide how information is introduced, developed, and concluded. Students are expected to formulate clear thesis statements, develop well-organized paragraphs, use transitions effectively, and support their arguments with evidence from credible sources. These structural expectations often pose significant difficulties for EFL learners who may come from educational backgrounds that emphasize rote memorization or formulaic writing. Without explicit instruction and modelling, students may struggle to recognize and replicate the patterns of academic discourse, leading to texts that are disjointed, unclear, or overly simplistic.

Moreover, fifth-semester students are frequently expected to incorporate external sources into their writing. This involves not only understanding and summarizing source material but also engaging with it critically—evaluating its relevance, comparing it with other perspectives, and integrating it into their own arguments. This level of engagement requires a strong foundation in reading comprehension, paraphrasing, summarizing, and referencing skills—all of which present additional hurdles for EFL learners. Many students experience difficulty distinguishing between their own voice and the voice of the sources they are using, which can lead to problems such as over-reliance on quotations or inadvertent plagiarism. Furthermore, unfamiliarity with citation styles such as APA or MLA

can hinder students from properly acknowledging sources, affecting both the credibility and academic integrity of their work.

Another significant challenge in improving academic writing skills among EFL students lies in the affective domain—namely, students' attitudes, beliefs, and levels of motivation regarding writing. Writing is often perceived as a stressful and high-stakes activity, particularly when conducted in a second or foreign language Yulandari, E. S., Paris, A. S., & Widiati, B. (2023). Many students report feelings of anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes, which can inhibit their willingness to take risks or express complex ideas. These affective barriers are particularly salient in the fifth semester, where academic expectations intensify and writing tasks become more demanding. Without adequate support and encouragement, students may become disengaged or develop negative attitudes toward academic writing, viewing it as a burdensome requirement rather than a meaningful skill.

Pedagogically, addressing these challenges requires a shift from traditional product-based approaches to more process-oriented and genre-based writing instruction. A process approach emphasizes the stages of writing—planning, drafting, revising, and editing—thus allowing students to develop their ideas gradually and receive feedback at multiple points. This approach encourages reflection, peer collaboration, and teacher scaffolding, all of which are critical for helping EFL learners gain confidence and improve the quality of their work. Genre-based instruction, on the other hand, focuses on exposing students to various academic text types (e.g., argumentative essays, research reports, case studies) and teaching them the specific language features and organizational structures associated with each genre. Through modelling and guided practice, students can learn to recognize patterns in academic discourse and apply them in their own writing.

Technological tools and online platforms can also play a significant role in enhancing academic writing skills. Tools such as online writing labs, grammar checkers, reference managers, and collaborative writing platforms (e.g., Google Docs) provide students with immediate support and foster a more interactive writing process. Additionally, the use of corpora and digital resources can expose learners to authentic academic texts, helping them internalize academic vocabulary, discourse markers, and rhetorical moves. However, effective integration of technology requires careful planning and instructional design, as not all students may be familiar with or have equal access to digital tools.

The role of teachers is paramount in facilitating the development of academic writing

skills. Teachers must not only provide clear and explicit instruction on writing conventions but also create an environment where students feel supported and empowered to experiment with language. Feedback—both formative and summative—plays a crucial role in this process. Constructive, timely, and specific feedback helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement, guiding them toward more effective writing practices. Moreover, peer feedback sessions, writing workshops, and writing centers can provide additional opportunities for practice and learning.

Cultural factors also influence how students approach academic writing. In many EFL contexts, students are accustomed to educational systems that prioritize memorization and teacher authority, which can hinder the development of critical thinking and independent argumentation—skills essential for academic writing. Therefore, writing instruction must be sensitive to students' cultural backgrounds while gradually introducing them to the norms of academic discourse in English Yulandari, E. S., & Paris, A. S. (2023). This includes fostering an understanding of concepts such as writer stance, hedging, intertextuality, and the rhetorical nature of academic argumentation.

Finally, the institutional context cannot be overlooked. Universities must ensure that academic writing is given sufficient attention across the curriculum, not just in language courses. Writing should be integrated into content-based courses and disciplinary instruction so that students have multiple opportunities to practice and apply their skills in authentic contexts. Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs can offer valuable models for supporting students at different stages of their academic journey. Furthermore, institutional investment in writing centers, tutoring programs, and faculty development initiatives can contribute to a more writing-rich academic environment.

In conclusion, improving academic writing skills among fifth-semester university students in EFL contexts is a multifaceted endeavour that requires attention to linguistic, cognitive, affective, pedagogical, and institutional factors. As students transition into more advanced stages of their academic careers, they must be equipped with the tools, strategies, and confidence necessary to meet the demands of academic writing. This article aims to explore these challenges in greater depth and propose practical approaches that can support both learners and educators in enhancing writing proficiency in EFL university settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative case study design to explore the challenges faced by fifth-semester university students in EFL contexts in developing their academic writing skills, as well as to identify effective strategies used by instructors to support students in this area. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of the students' experiences, perceptions, and writing development within their academic environment. This approach also enabled the researchers to analyze the instructional practices, feedback mechanisms, and institutional supports that influence writing proficiency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Challenges in Academic Writing Among Fifth-Semester EFL Students

The data revealed several persistent challenges faced by the students in developing academic writing skills:

a. Structural Organization and Coherence

Students frequently struggled to organize their ideas logically and coherently. Analysis of their essays showed disjointed paragraph development and unclear thesis statements. Interviews confirmed that many students lacked a solid understanding of academic text structures, such as introduction-body-conclusion formats, topic sentences, and paragraph unity.

b. Language Accuracy and Vocabulary Use

Grammar errors—particularly in verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and article usage—were common. Limited academic vocabulary also hindered clarity and conciseness. Instructors noted that students often resorted to informal or conversational language, which diminished the academic tone of their writing.

c. Source Integration and Referencing

The ability to use sources effectively was a major area of difficulty. Students demonstrated poor paraphrasing skills, tended to overuse quotations, and frequently omitted proper in-text citations. Some cases of unintentional plagiarism were found due to a lack of understanding of academic integrity and referencing norms (APA style).

d. Affective Factors

Student journals revealed feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and low motivation when completing writing tasks. Several students expressed fear of making grammatical errors and receiving criticism, which often led to avoidance behaviour and procrastination.

These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that EFL learners often face multilayered difficulties in writing due to limited linguistic resources, lack of genre awareness, and affective barriers (Hyland, 2003; Zhang, 2011).

2. Effective Instructional Practices Identified

Despite these challenges, several instructional strategies were found to be effective in supporting students:

a. Scaffolding and Modelling

Instructors frequently used sample texts and guided writing exercises to demonstrate how academic texts are constructed. Observation data indicated that students benefited from analyzing model essays and practicing genre-specific writing under teacher guidance.

b. Feedback and Revision Process

The integration of peer review and teacher feedback cycles significantly improved writing quality. Students who received detailed formative feedback on early drafts showed greater improvement in coherence and source integration in their final submissions.

c. Writing Journals and Reflection

Students who maintained reflective journals demonstrated higher awareness of their writing process. Reflection allowed them to identify personal challenges and develop metacognitive strategies to address them, such as using outlines or checking grammar with tools like Grammarly.

d. Technology Integration

The use of Google Docs for collaborative editing and online resources (e.g., Purdue OWL for APA formatting) enhanced students' engagement. Teachers encouraged students to use citation tools and writing apps like Wattpad Application, which helped reduce citation errors and improved overall formatting.

These practices support pedagogical recommendations by writing scholars who advocate for process-oriented and genre-based instruction, especially in EFL contexts (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2007).

3. Student Progress and Perceived Improvements

Document analysis revealed measurable improvements in writing quality over the semester. For example, 72% of students demonstrated clearer paragraph structure and improved cohesion in their final essays compared to earlier drafts. Interviews also reflected

growing confidence among students, especially those who actively participated in revision sessions and writing workshops.

While progress varied across individuals, the majority of participants acknowledged that the course had helped them become more aware of academic conventions and less fearful of writing. This suggests that a supportive instructional environment that emphasizes process, feedback, and reflection can foster both competence and confidence in academic writing.

CONCLUSION

Academic writing remains a significant challenge for EFL university students, particularly in the fifth semester, when expectations for critical thinking, scholarly expression, and textual sophistication increase. This research found that students commonly struggle with organizing ideas, maintaining language accuracy, integrating sources, and navigating the emotional demands of writing in a second language. However, the implementation of structured instructional strategies—such as scaffolding, peer feedback, reflective writing, and technological support—proved effective in enhancing students' academic writing skills.

These findings highlight the importance of designing writing courses that go beyond grammar instruction and adopt a holistic approach that addresses cognitive, affective, and contextual dimensions of writing. Teachers should serve as facilitators who model academic discourse, provide timely feedback, and create opportunities for authentic practice. Institutions, in turn, must support writing development across disciplines by embedding writing instruction in the curriculum and offering access to writing centres' and online resources.

Ultimately, improving academic writing in EFL contexts requires sustained effort and collaboration among students, teachers, and institutions. By equipping students with the necessary tools and fostering a positive writing culture, universities can help learners succeed academically and prepare them for future scholarly or professional pursuits.

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