



## **THE CHALLENGES FACED BY ENGLISH STUDENTS IN ACADEMIC WRITING (A CASE STUDY AT UIN SULTHANTHAHA SAIFUDDIN JAMBI)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to investigate the difficulties encountered by students of English in academic writing at the Islamic University State Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, focusing on previous academic year 2022/2023. Employing a qualitative approach through a case study design, the research gathered data via interviews and document analysis. Findings revealed that students face several challenges in academic writing, including plagiarism, lexical complexities, grammatical errors, topic selection, inadequate planning, lack of motivation, and punctuation issues.

*Keywords:* Academic Writing, Challenges, English Students

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Writing is considered a crucial skill in the journey of mastering English. According to Trimadona (2014), proficiency in writing is essential, especially in academic settings where students must adeptly complete writing tasks to articulate their ideas effectively. Various forms of writing, such as essays, research papers, theses, and reports, exist, each demanding different levels of study and practice. Academic writing, however, presents greater challenges compared to other forms due to its rigorous requirements for enhancing learners' writing skills (Puspita, 2019). Nenotek et al. (2022) emphasize that academic writing plays a vital role in the learning process by fostering self-development through argumentative and scholarly writing tasks.

Ali and Mubarak (2017) note that academic writing poses significant challenges for English as a foreign language students due to its complex linguistic demands. Academic writing encompasses all forms of writing aimed at achieving educational goals, and many universities, including the State Islamic University State Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, offer courses dedicated to it. However, not all students proficiently master academic writing. Challenges commonly faced by university students include difficulties in grammar,



paraphrasing sentences, and selecting appropriate terminology within their academic disciplines.

Given these challenges, the research aims to explore and identify the specific difficulties encountered by English students in academic writing at UIN STS Jambi. The central research question guiding this study is, "What are the challenges faced by English students in Academic Writing at State Islamic University State Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi?" The study's objective aligns with this question, aiming to uncover and elucidate the obstacles English students encounter in their academic writing pursuits at UIN STS Jambi.

Academic writing encompasses all forms of writing that serve educational objectives, characterized by its formal style and rigorous demands. According to Sinta et al. (2019), it is a critical skill taught at universities, emphasizing clarity, coherence, and adherence to scholarly conventions. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) define academic writing as any writing produced within an educational setting, grounded in systematic investigation and scholarly discourse. Academic writing includes various types such as research papers, theses, scientific journals, dissertations, and others, all aimed at sharing analyzed, processed, and discussed information (Pratomo A.W, 2018).

Lubango (2017) highlights specific features of academic writing, including academic vocabulary, accuracy, citation, clarity, coherence, cohesion, consistency, evidence-based support, fluency, and formal language, while cautioning against choppy sentences, clichés, comma splices, contractions, rhetorical questions, and informal language. Moreover, Mary and Christine (2019) stress that effective academic writing should be understandable, clear, free of jargon, concise, fact-based, analytical, inclusive of diverse perspectives, supported by research, avoid broad generalizations, and properly acknowledge sources.

Distinct from other forms of writing, academic writing is characterized by its formal style and purpose to fulfill educational objectives. Its challenges are manifold, posing significant difficulties for EFL students in Indonesia. As noted by Trimadona (2014), writing proficiency remains a challenge among many students, exacerbated by issues such as plagiarism, lexical difficulties, grammatical errors, and lack of planning (David E, 2019). Khadijah (2020) and



Byrne (1995) further categorize these challenges into psychological, linguistic, and cognitive domains, including difficulties in topic selection, punctuation, motivation, and teachers' instructional strategies (Chasanah, 2020).

Plagiarism, a serious concern in academic writing, occurs when students present others' ideas or words as their own without proper attribution (Kumar, 2022). It reflects a broader issue of academic integrity and is influenced by factors such as peer influence, personal attitudes, internet accessibility, and understanding gaps among students (Silfiani et al., 2019). Grammatical errors and lexical difficulties also hinder effective communication in academic writing, impacting the clarity and coherence of students' work (Huan et al., 2021).

Planning plays a crucial role in overcoming these challenges, as effective preparation can streamline the writing process and enhance the quality of academic output (Khadijah, 2020). Additionally, choosing a suitable topic, mastering punctuation rules, maintaining motivation, and adapting to teachers' instructional approaches are essential for navigating the complexities of academic writing (Fatima, 2020; Aldabbus, 2022). Internal factors like motivation and confidence, along with external factors such as teaching styles and classroom environments, significantly influence students' experiences and outcomes in academic writing (Budjalemba and Listyani, 2020).

In conclusion, academic writing demands meticulous attention to detail, adherence to scholarly standards, and a commitment to continuous improvement in language proficiency and critical thinking skills among students.

## **B. METHOD**

This qualitative descriptive research adopts a case study approach, focusing on a specific case—the challenges faced by English students in Academic Writing. Case study methodology, as described by Muhlisian (2013), involves in-depth analysis of a particular case to meticulously observe and analyze it. The choice of case study was motivated by the researcher's intention to thoroughly investigate the challenges encountered in Academic Writing, enabling a comprehensive understanding of individual experiences and related



factors. This approach allows for the collection of detailed and accurate data derived directly from the field.

Conducted at the Islamic University State Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, the research targeted previous students of the English Education program who had taken Academic Writing in the academic year 2022/2023. The university is located on JL. Lintas Muara Bulian KM. 16, Simpang Sungai Duren, Kec, Jambi Luar Kota, Kab. Muaro Jambi, Provinsi Jambi. The sampling method employed was convenience random sampling, specifically selecting 10 students from Class B who participated in Academic Writing during the specified academic year. The study maintained flexibility in terms of location and timing for data collection.

Data collection involved two main methods: interviews and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the selected participants, audio-recorded, and transcribed into written form to capture their insights on the challenges faced in Academic Writing. The selection criteria ensured that participants were suitable respondents who had completed or submitted Academic Writing projects. Additionally, documentation included analysis of the final projects submitted by the same 10 students from the academic year 2022/2023, providing supplementary insights into their academic writing processes and outcomes.

### **C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The finding of this research are based on interview that the researcher was conducted from September to October 2023. Researcher conducted research at UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin in Jambi. From the results of interviewed, the researcher found that students faced some challenges in Academic Writing.

#### **Plagiarism**

Based on interviewed with previous Academic Writings' students, they mentioned that one of challenges they are faced is avoiding plagiarism. In the interview process, the researcher asked the English Educations' students with the question about the challenges in avoiding plagiarism, and they answered:

*"I faced some challenges in avoiding plagiarism"*



***(Interview, Student 8, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023).***

*“I have faced challenges in paraphrasing, and found thereferences”*

***(Interview, Student 2, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)***

*“I do not understand about direct quotation and indirect quotation”*

***(Interview, Student 3, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)***

From this interview above, the researcher found that they faced same challenges in avoiding plagiarism. In avoiding plagiarism there are some challenges they faced. First, they faced some challenges in quotation. In writing the other person opinion, they faced some challenges in paraphrasing and summarizing the sentences, they have difficulties in finding appropriate word to describe their idea in paraphrasing and summarizing. and the last challenges in avoiding plagiarism is citation, they said that they are still

*“It is hard to find the correct word in paraphrasing and summarizing, I also have less understanding in citation”*

***(Interview, student 7, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023)***

In addition, from the interview process with the students, some students also said that one of the challenges they faced in Academic Writing is against the laziness. They said:

*“Sometimes it is hard to find the references, so I just copied from google without mention the writer”*

***(Interview, Student 1, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)***

Based on the interview above, the researcher found that English Students faced some challenges in avoiding plagiarism and against laziness. The students had difficulty in quotation, they faced some challenges in paraphrasing and summarizing the sentences. The other challenges they faced is citation. Based on the interview they still confuse about how to cite the other writer even though they used Mendeley application.

## **Lexical Aspect**



According to interview with previous Academic Writing students of English Education at UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, they mentioned that lexical aspect is one of challenges they faced in Academic Writing. In the interview process, they answered:

*“Lexical aspect is one of the challenges I faced in writing Academic Writing”*

**(Interview, Student 2, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“I faced challenges in making cohesive and coherent sentences”*

**(Interview, Student 6, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“In lexical aspect, the most challenging is finding the appropriate word”*

**(Interview, Student 3, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“I have difficulty in combining each sentence, and I still confusing about conjunction”*

**(Interview, Student 9, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

From the interview above, the researcher found that previous Academic Writings' students faced challenge in lexical aspect. The first challenges they faced in lexical aspect is making coherent and cohesive paragraph. The other challenges they faced is finding appropriate word to describe their idea. They are still confusing about formal and informal word, and sometimes the word they chosen make the sentences look strange. The last, they are still confusing about conjunction and how to combine each sentences and each paragraphs.

### **Grammatical Error**

Based on previous Academic Writings' students interviewed, grammar identified as a challenges in writing Academic Writing. The interview that have been conducted show that students still lack grammar. Throughout the interview, the English Educations' students answered question by researcher that:

*“I still confusing about the structure for some tenses”*

**(Interview, Student 1, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“I faced difficulties to decide what tenses should use”*

**(Interview, Student 2, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“In grammar aspect, the challenges thing is passive voice”*



**(Interview, Student 4, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“I have some challenges in writing Academic Writing because I do not know about the function of some tenses”*

**(Interview, Student 5, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

Based on the interview above the researcher found that some students still faced challenges in grammar aspect. Based on the interview, there were some grammatical error in their academic writing. Some students answered that they still confuse to choosing what tenses should use and some students still confuse about the function of each tenses. In the interview they said that they had difficulty in choosing the tenses that are appropriate to show the correct time.

The other challenge they faced is writing with the correct structure, they said that their understanding about tenses. They faced some challenges in verb change. The last challenges they faced is passive voice.

### **Lack of Planning**

According to the interview with previous academic writing, lack of planning is identified as the cause of some challenges students faced in writing academic paper. In the interview section, they said:

*“I confused in writing because I do not make a planning”*

**(Interview, Student 2, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“Because of lack of planning, I faced some challenges in developing idea and I also confuse in making a planning for my paper”* **(Interview, Student 3, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“I have difficulties in developing ideas”*

**(Interview, Student 4, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“Making pre-writing is a challenge for me”*

**(Interview, Student 7, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**



Based on the interview above, the researcher found that some students making a planning is a challenging from them, and some students said that lack of planning is the cause of appearing challenges in writing academic paper. The challenge that appear because of lack of planning is developing idea, they said that it is hard to developing the idea since they did not have a strong planning. Some students also said that making a making a planning is a challenging for them, they say that they are faced some challenges in making a pre-writing.

### **Choosing Topic**

According to the interview of some previous Academic Writing students in academic year 2022/2023 they said that they are faced some challenges inchoosing topic for their academic writing. In the interviewed section, they answered:

*“In choosing topic, the challenge I faced is looking for interesting topicand newest topic”*

**(Interview, Student 1, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

Based on the result of the interviewed above, the researcher found that the most challenging they faced in choosing topic is looking for interesting topic and newest topic. Since they are many references in the internet, they still confuse in choosing topic. They said that sometimes the topic that they claimed interesting are not interesting for the reader or did not useful and there are many writers write about those topics

### **Punctuation**

According to the interviewed with some previous Academic Writings’ students. Punctuation identified as a challenging for some students. It is showed by the interview have done with some students of English Education. In the interviewed section, the researcher asked *“what are the challenges doyou faced in putting the right punctuation in your academic writing”*, they answered:



*“I still confuse about the use of each punctuation”*

**(Interview, Student 10, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“In punctuation aspect, the challenge is put the punctuation in correct place”*

**(Interview, Student 1, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

Based on the result of the interviewed above, the researcher found that the challenges in punctuation aspect are understanding the function of each punctuations and put the punctuations in the correct place. Based on the interview, sometime some students did not put the punctuations in the correctplace, so the meaning of the sentences changed because of it.

### **Lack of Motivation**

According to the interview 10 (ten) previous Academic Writings’ students. Lack of motivation identified as one of the cause of appearing the challenges in writing academic paper. In the interview section, the researcherasked *“What are the challenges do you faced in writing academic paper caused by lack of motivation”*, they answered:

*“The challenges I faced because of lack of motivation is against the laziness”*

**(Interview, Student 10, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*“I do not have any inspirations in writing because of lack of motivation”*

**(Interview, Student 2, August 7<sup>th</sup>,2023)**

*“I also faced difficulties in developing idea because of lack of motivation”*

**(Interview, Student 4, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

Based on the interviewed above, some challenges they faced caused bylack of motivation are against laziness, looking for the inspiration, anddeveloping idea. Students’ challenges in writing caused by lack of motivationis also can not get by students’ academic writing paper, so the researcher onlyserved the data from the interview.

### **Teachers’ Strategy**



According to the interviewed with previous Academic Writings' students of English Education, teachers' strategy did not identify as a cause of challenges faced by English students. In the interview section, the researcher asked the respondents "*What are the challenges do you faced in writing academic paper caused by teachers' strategy in teaching*", they answered:

*"I did not face some challenges because of teachers' strategies in teaching"*

**(Interview, Student 1, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*"Teachers' strategy helps me a lot to understanding the material"*

**(Interview, Student 10, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

*"Our Academic Writings' teacher used great strategies in teaching"*

**(Interview, Student 3, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023)**

Based on the interview above, teacher strategy was not the cause of challenges faced by English students. In contrast with the other item, they say that teachers' strategy helped them a lot to understanding the material about Academic Writing. The last aspect that was served by the researche is teachers' strategy in teaching. In teachers' strategy aspect the researcher can not serve the data from students' academic writing paper, because the data can not see from students' academic writing paper.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Based on the analysis of the data, it was determined that students who previously worked on academic writing at Islamic University State faced challenges primarily related to avoiding plagiarism, grammatical errors, lexical issues, lack of planning, lack of motivation, choosing topics, and punctuation. However, the analysis did not identify teachers' strategies as a significant challenge faced by these students.

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