

**The First Year Students' Difficulties in Writing English Academic Text**

*A Publication Script*

Submitted to the Faculty of Language Education  
as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
*Sarjana Pendidikan*



Zulfa Fadhila Ardiani

20140810057

**English Language Education Department**

**Faculty of Language Education**

**Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta**

**2018**

Approval Page of Publication Script

The First Year Students' Difficulties in Writing English Academic Text

By:

Zulfa Fadhlia Ardiani

20140810057

August 25, 2018



Andi Wirantaka, S.Pd., M.Hum

The Steps Supervisor

August 25, 2018



Milah Mardiningrum, S.Pd., M.A.

Examiner 1

August 25, 2018



Mayam Sorehm, S.S., M.HSc

Examiner 2

Yogyakarta, August 25, 2018



Dr. Suryanto

Dean of Language Education Faculty

# The First Year Students' Difficulties in Writing English Academic Text

Zulfa Fadhila Ardiani

English Language Education Department, Language Education Faculty of  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia

[Zulfa.fadhila.2014@fpb.umy.ac.id](mailto:Zulfa.fadhila.2014@fpb.umy.ac.id)

## Abstract

Academic writing was important to make the students to be more academic in writing and foster their critical thinking. However, in order to make a good academic text some students still face the difficulties in writing academic text. Hence, this research is conducted to find out the first year students' difficulties in writing English academic text and the factors causing the first year students difficulties in writing academic text at an English Language Department. This research used qualitative research approach and descriptive qualitative as the research design. The research took place at English Language Education Department at a private university in Yogyakarta. The data were gathered by interviewing four first year ELED students. The findings of this research revealed that the first year students had several difficulties in writing academic text. They were difficulty in generating the ideas about the topic, giving supporting detail, organizing the ideas, expressing the idea, and using the correct grammar. Related to the factors causing the difficulty, this research found that the factors include the lack of critical thinking, the lack of reading, exhaustion, the unclear explanation from the instructor, the lack of vocabulary, and the lack of grammar knowledge.

*Keywords:* Writing difficulties, academic writing

## Introduction

One of the types of writing is academic writing. Abu-Ghararah and Hamzah (as cited in Al Badi, 2015) pointed that, academic writing is the written sentences that are organized well within a paragraph and paragraphs, and the expression of the ideas in the units of a text. It means that academic writing is a written form of our idea that is presented logically and systematically in a unit of a discourse. Moreover, according to Aholjailan (2015), academic writing is the

kind of writing that the purpose is not for pleasing the readers instead it used to satisfy the students' instructor. From those statements, it can be inferred that academic writing is the kind of writing that is meant for academics such as teacher, students, and many more in which the writer needs to write properly and present the ideas logically and systematically.

Academic writing is important because it can encourage the students to write properly. It is because in academic writing the students are required to follow the rule of academic writing such as the use of correct grammar, the appropriate punctuation, the correct vocabulary, and so on (Abdulkareem, 2013). It means, academic writing is important for the students to habituate them to write properly, and think critically.

Academic writing is somewhat challenging because to make a good one, the writer need to fulfil some requirements of good academic text. The requirements of academic writing to be considered as a good academic text such as the use of correct grammar, well-organized paragraph, the use of proper vocabulary and many more, but to fulfill the requirements of good academic text some students still face some difficulties (Abdulkareem, 2013; Wanja, 2016). It indicates that the standard of a good academic text becomes a challenge for some students because they need to fulfill some requirements such as well-organized paragraph, the proper vocabulary, and so on. In addition, Fadda (2012) supported that academic writing is the biggest challenge for the students in higher education so they still need support to write a good academic text. Support here means that the students still need some helps from their instructor to guide them in producing a good academic text. In conclusion, writing a good academic text becomes a challenge for some students because there are some requirements to be fulfilled, but some students feel difficult to fill it. Hence, it caused them to be guided in order to produce a good academic text.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to find out the first year students' difficulties and the causing factors of the difficulties in writing English academic text. It has two research questions, they are:

1. What are the difficulties in writing English academic text faced by the first year students of English Language Education Department in one of private university in Yogyakarta?
2. What are the factors causing the difficulties in writing English academic text of the first year students at English Language Education Department in one of private university in Yogyakarta?

### **Literature Review**

One of the types of writing is academic writing. Based on Abdulkareem (2013), academic writing can be characterized as a writing that requires several rules such as organizing and generating students' ideas, critical thinking, using proper vocabulary, and using the correct grammar. Hence, it could be inferred that academic writing is a proper writing in which the students are required to present their idea clearly and logically.

Academic writing is also studied by the first year students and it is provided in the first semester (Maher, 2011). The first year students' academic writing instructor focuses the academic writing activity on the text production that focuses on academic text structure (e.g. introduction, body, conclusion), how to write a good paragraph as well as the required information, and discuss the language feature such as spelling, punctuation, etc. (Twagilimana, 2017).

There are some requirements to be fulfilled to produce a good academic text, but some research found that there are some difficulties faced by the students to produce a good academic text. Hedge (as cited in Alfaki, 2015) pointed that there are several categories of problems in writing, those problems are grammatical problem, problem in sentence structure, problem of diction, spelling problem, punctuation problem, capitalization problem, organization problem, and content problem that includes problem in generating the ideas about the topic, problem in elaborating the paragraph, and problem in expressing the idea.

There are also some reasons causing the difficulties in writing English academic text. Some research already conducted to find out the factors causing the difficulties in writing academic text. Based on Mutimani (2016), there are several factors causing the difficulties in writing academic text among students

that are lack of writing practice, the unclear explanation from the lecturer, lack of knowledge, and the habit of using slang language.

### **Methodology**

This research used qualitative research approach and descriptive qualitative as the research design. The research took place at English Language Education Department at a private university in Yogyakarta. The data were gathered by interviewing four first year ELED students. Therefore the participants were the students of ELED batch 2017 who already took Academic Reading and Writing course. In order to get richer data, the participants were one student who got excellent, one student who got good, one student who got average, and one student who got poor grade in Academic Reading and Writing course. Furthermore the data were analyzed by using four coding that are open, analytical, axial, and selective coding

### **Findings**

This research is focused to find out the first year students' difficulties in writing English academic text and the factors causing the first year students' difficulties in writing English academic text.

#### *The First Year Students' Difficulties in Writing English Academic Text*

There were five findings related to the difficulties in writing English academic text faced by the first year English Language Education Department students in this research. They were difficulty in generating the ideas about the topic, giving supporting detail, organizing the ideas, expressing the idea, and using the correct grammar.

**Difficulty in generating the idea about the topic.** It has been found in this research that the students found difficulty in generating the ideas about the topic. This research found that the students seemed to have no ideas about what would be discussed in the given topic after the topic has been given by the lecturer because they needed to think critically if they wanted to make the points. Murshidi (2014) pointed that one of the difficulties faced by the students in academic writing was generating the idea according to the topic being written.

**Difficulty in giving supporting details.** Another finding in this research was about difficulty in giving supporting details. The students in this research had a problem in term of giving supporting details, that is, they felt difficult to give evidence and explanation in order to make the writing more detail. This finding was supported by Alfaki (2015) who found that, in writing, the students had trouble in developing the paragraph, that is, they were less able to give supporting detail to develop the main idea.

**Difficulty in organizing the ideas.** Organizing the ideas in order also became something difficult for one the first year students in this research. The students felt difficult to organize the ideas because they confused on what idea that needed to be stated first. At this point, what is meant by organizing the ideas was arranging the sentence (ideas) within a text or a paragraph. Kalikoha (2008) found that the majority of the students revised their essay, and most of them needed to re-organize the ideas.

**Difficulty in expressing the idea.** Sometimes, showing the idea was not easy because there was something that could obstruct the students to show their idea in a written form. Basically, the students had the idea to write, but it became difficult because when they wanted to write their idea, they did not know the vocabulary. This finding was in line with Al-Khasawneh (2010) who mentioned that the students were often lack of vocabulary while writing. As a consequence, the students who lacked of vocabulary were unable to show their ideas freely and accurately because they have less vocabulary to use.

**Difficulty in using the correct grammar.** This research found that the students found to be difficult in using the correct grammar. Moreover, grammar became the big issue in writing academic text in this research since all of the four participants in this research was identified that they had difficulties in term of grammar. Furthermore, this research found that there are three areas of difficulty in term of grammar. They are in term of inability on the use of correct tenses, incomplete sentence while making sentence by using conjunction, and inability to use phrasal verb. According to Al-Khasawneh (2010), Grammar was extremely important to convey accurate messages. However, Hirano (2011) reported that grammar was one of the most common language weaknesses affecting writing. As

a consequence, the students who had weaknesses in grammar, they may convey inaccurate message.

*The Causing Factors of the First Year Students' Difficulties in Writing English Academic Text*

There were five main findings about the factors causing the difficulties in writing English academic text. They were the lack of critical thinking, the lack of reading, exhaustion, the unclear explanation from the instructor, the lack of vocabulary, and the lack of grammar knowledge.

**The lack of critical thinking.** In this research, the lack of critical thinking found as one of the factors caused the students' difficulties in writing academic text. The lack of critical thinking was the factor caused the difficulty in generating the idea about the topic. Furthermore, critical thinking was needed to decide whether or not the points that will be discussed in academic text are relevant with the topic. Thus, if the students were lack of critical thinking, deciding the relevant points became something difficult. Bair and Mader (2013) reported that the lack of critical thinking was one of the students' weaknesses that caused them difficult to make an academic text.

**The lack of reading.** The lack of reading also found as one of the factors that affected the students' performance in writing academic text. It has been found that the lack of reading caused the students difficult to generate the ideas about the topic and give supporting details that is giving evidence and explanations. Olness (as cited in Murshidi, 2014) also pointed that reading help the students to overcome their difficulty in writing because they would had knowledge related to the topic being written to put into their writing. Hence, if the students lack of reading, they would lack of knowledge about the topic that would be discussed.

**Exhaustion.** This research, found that exhaustion also the factor which caused the difficulty in writing academic text. Exhaustion became the factors which causing the difficulty in elaborating the main idea, which means giving supporting details. The student in this research mentioned that exhaustion make the student lack of concentration so that it affected their performance in writing.

**The unclear explanation from the instructor.** This research found that the unclear explanation from the instructor when explaining about academic text



affected the students' ability in writing academic text. This research revealed that the lecturer gave the unclear explanation when they explained the organization of the ideas. It included how to put the argument properly, what needs to be written after the main idea, and so on. Hence, it made them to be confused on how to organize the ideas. Tulley (2013) stated that the unclear instruction from the instructor was one of the sources of the students' poor performance in writing. Hence, the lack of teaching competency from the teacher in teaching writing caused the students to face the difficulty in writing.

**The lack of vocabulary.** The next factor which affected the students' performance in writing academic text was about the lack of vocabulary. Basically, when the students in this research wrote, they knew about what they wanted to write, but in the process of writing they became obstructed because they did not know the English vocabulary. Hence, the lack of vocabulary caused the students to be difficult to express their idea. Adas and Bakir (2013) also found that mostly EFL students were lack of the adequate stock of English vocabulary, so that they faced the difficulty to state their idea when writing.

**The lack of grammar knowledge.** Another factor that causing the students' difficulty in writing academic text found in this research was the lack of grammar knowledge. Moreover this research also found that the lack of grammar knowledge also generate from the lack of motivation to learn grammar. For instance, the participants in this research thought that grammar was difficult and confusing to be learnt, so they did not like grammar. Thus, this research found that the lack of motivation to learn grammar affected the students' ability to use the correct grammar while writing. Hirano (2011) pointed that one of the most common factors affecting the students' weaknesses in writing is the lack of grammar knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

There were five main findings related to the difficulties in writing English academic text faced by the first year English Language Education Department students in this research. They were difficulty in generating the ideas about the topic, giving supporting detail, organizing the ideas, expressing the idea, and using the correct grammar. Related to the factors causing the difficulty, this

research found that there are internal factors such as the lack of critical thinking, the lack of reading, exhaustion, the lack of vocabulary, and the lack of grammar knowledge and external factor such as the unclear explanation from the instructor.

## References

- Abdulkareem, M. N. (2013). An investigation study of academic writing problems faced by Arab postgraduate students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(9), 1552-1557.
- Aholjailan, A. (2015). *Perceptions of academic writing by some Saudi graduate students studying in American universities*. Doctoral dissertation.
- Al Badi, I. A. (2015). Academic writing difficulties of ESL. *WEI International Academic Conference* (pp. 65-78). Barcelona: The West East Institute.
- Alfaki, I. M. (2015). University students' English writing problems: Diagnosis and remedy. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 3(3), 40-52.
- Al-Khasawneh, F. M. (2010). Writing for academic purposes: problems faced by Arab postgraduate students of the college of business, UUM. *ESP World*, 9(2), 1-23.
- Bair, M. A., & Mader, C. E. (2013). Academic writing at the graduate level: improving the curriculum through faculty collaboration. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 10(1), 1-14.
- Fadda, H. A. (2012, March). Difficulties in academic writing: from the perspective of King Saudi University postgraduate students. *English Language Teaching*, 5(3), 123-130.
- Hirano, E. (2011). Refugees negotiating academic literacies in first-year college: challenges, strategies, and resources. *Applied linguistics and English as a second language dissertations*.
- Hirano, E. (2011). Refugees negotiating academic literacies in first-year college: challenges, strategies, and resources. *Applied linguistics and English as a second language dissertations*.
- Murshidi, G. G. (2014). UAE university male students' interests impact on reading and writing performance and improvement. *English Language Teaching*, 7(14), 57-63.

Tulley, C. (2013). Teaching/writing: The journal of writing teacher education.

*What are preservice teachers taught about the teaching of writing?: A survey of Ohio's undergraduate writing methods courses*, 2(1), 38-49.

Wanja, M. S. (2016). Challenges faced by undergraduate students in academic writing: A case of Kenyan students. *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research*, 1(2), 1-25.