

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

This chapter discusses theories related to the topic of the research. There are several contents which must be discussed in the literature, including definition of academic writing, definition of academic essays, difficulties in writing academic essays, strategies to solve the difficulties in writing academic essay, conceptual framework and review of related studies.

#### Academic writing

Academic writing is related to undergraduate or graduate students in college or university level. Whitaker (2009) mentioned that academic writing is basically, the writing that someone has to do for the requirement of university courses. Similar to Whitaker, according to Bailey (2003), *academic writing* is assigned for someone who is studying or planning to study at universities, and has to write essays and other assignments for exams or coursework. Based on these statements, it can be concluded that academic writing is any kinds of writing which is done as a partial fulfilment of requirements in a college or university. Also academic writing is a process of putting an idea and using deductive reasoning, formal language and third person point-of-view. It is in line with UTS Library (2013) academic writing is the style of writing that investigates an issue and presents someone's ideas based on the evidence of research, and also uses a formal language. "Academic writing is a window into what students can do in the larger domain of academic discourse within disciplinary communities" (Wolsey, Lapp, & Fisher, 2012, p. 714). From that point, academic writing is seen as a

window for students in bigger field of intellectual communication, which is means students cloud write their idea in the form of written document.

Writing in academic contexts will be dealing between cognition, the content, the genre, writing strategies and the student's conception of the writing process (Robertson, 2014). Therefore, in academic writing students' critical thinking and analytical thinking are really needed. Since they must put their idea in the form of writing that is why their critical thinking and analytical thinking are really needed. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) found that when students are asked to describe their principles for academic writing, they tend to discover clear evidence to support the writing, open-minded, and disciplined in study. This research presents evidence of the importance that students pay attention on the principles for academic writing. It shows that students understand that in academic writing they must support their writing by evidences. Fadda (2012) wrote that academic writing is an intellectual and cognitive activity since it is a conception of the intelligence. It is proven that academic writing is one of the activities that would make students more critical because they need to elaborate their idea in the form of writing.

In academic writing, there are several things that need to be considered by the writer. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) mentioned that, there are four rules for academic writing, and the rules include avoiding the first person, using formal language, having a clear thesis statement and elaborating the paragraph clearly. Whitaker (2009) presented that academic writing has nine principles that need to be considered, they are

**Clear Purpose.** The purpose of the writing is to answer the question which is discussed as the topic. The most familiar purposes in academic writing are persuasive, analytical, and informative purpose. First, persuasive writing include argumentative essay and position papers. Second, analytical writing include analysis papers and critical analysis. Last, informative purpose this different with an analytical purpose, it is because this purpose try to enlarge the readers' point of view.

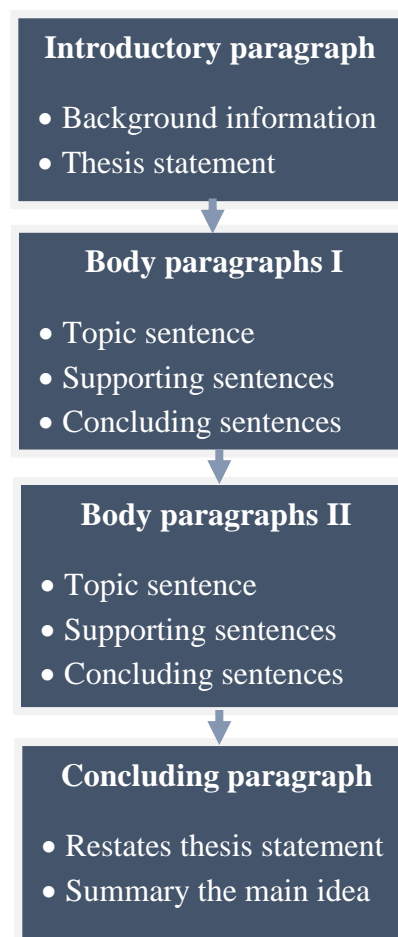
**Audience Engagement.** Similar to other writing, academic writing aims at a specific audience in mind. The writer has to engage the readers with the ideas and take their interest with the writers writing style. So, in academic writing, it is better to use the proper analysis and evidence to convince readers of your ideas.

**Clear Point of View.** Even though the writers will present other people's ideas or research, the goal of the writing is to show what the writer thinks about these things. The papers should present the original ideas from the writers. Also the writer should support the idea with supporting details.

**Single Focus.** Every paragraph, even every sentence, in the paper will support the thesis statement. The essay should not contain unnecessary, irrelevant, unimportant, or contradictory information. In short, the writers should pay attention that they need to give strong support for the thesis statement.

**Logical Organization.** Academic writing consists of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and concluding paragraph. The introductory paragraph develops the readers' interest, provides background information and allows the reader to identify the topic that is going to be discussed. It also has the thesis statement on the introductory paragraph. The body paragraph supports the

thesis statement. Each body paragraph has one central point to support the thesis, which is called a topic sentence. Then, each point is supported in the paragraph with specific details and explanation. Every sentence should unite to the one before and after it, so that the readers do not have too much effort to find the correlation between ideas. The concluding paragraph restates the thesis statement, and sums up the paper, and main idea it also explains the reader the importance of the paper's findings for the readers



*Figure 1. The structure of an essay. It illustrates how an essay is organized.*

**Strong Support.** Each body paragraph has adequate and related support for the topic sentence and thesis statement. This support consists of facts, examples, description, personal experience, and expert opinions and quotations. Oshima and Hogue (2006) mention that “every good paragraph has a topic sentence, which clearly states the topic and the controlling idea of the paragraph” (p.4). It is because the topic sentence would show what the paragraph is going to discuss and the topic sentence is a helpful guide to both the writer and the reader.

**Clear and Complete Explanations.** The reader should not have to think hard to identify the ideas, logic, or organization in the paper. The readers expect everything to be done clearly for them. Therefore, the explanation on the papers should be clearly and completely explained.

**Effective Use of Research.** The writing should refer to a high-quality, professional and academic sources. In the writing, it will use other research to support the writers' ideas. This means that source material will be introduced, analyzed, explained, and then cited.

**Writing Style.** A writer has to write as interesting as possible, it will make the reader interest to read the papers. The writing should be clear, concise, and easy to read. It is also very important that there are no grammars, spelling, punctuation, or vocabulary mistakes in academic writing. Those nine principles are needed to be considered for students in academic writing.

Another important thing in academic writing is that students should not translate the whole sentence from mother tongue. It is for the non-native writers. According to Norris (2016), writers can use their mother tongues to take note, and

write outline, but translate word-for-word into English will create interference in academic writing. When students try to translate the whole sentence from their mother tongue, it perhaps will damage the grammar and the vocabulary. The result of the writing will be unclear, and full of errors.

Yugianingrum (2010) mentioned four characteristics of good academic writing. First, writing should play an important role for other people which means when someone writes papers those papers should give advantages to other. Second, the topic should be motivating for the writer and interesting for the readers. Third, the writer must concern about the aesthetic quality of the text, it is must for every writers they need to maintain the quality of the text. Last, the writers should facilitate related resources and finding support.

### **Academic essays**

Academic Essays, if these two are words break down into two elements, it will become academic and essay. According to Oxford dictionary (2008), academic is "teaching or learning in school" (p.2), whereas essay is "a short piece of writing on one subject" (p.150). Meyers (2003) states that "an essay is an organized discussion of subject in series of paragraph" (p. 38). Therefore, the researcher can conclude that academic essays are short pieces of writing, containing organized discussion of a subject, which is written in the academic field. Oshima and Hogue (2006) wrote that an academic essay is a piece of writing, consisting of few extensive paragraphs, and it discussed about one topic. Basically academic essay is a part of academic writing. In academic essays, the writer is discussing one topic in their writing.

In this research, the researcher focuses on three kinds of academic essays. It is because these three essays are the most familiar essays which are used in the English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (EED of UMY). These kinds of essays are argumentative, comparison and contrast, and cause and effect essays. Each variation or category of different academic essays is written in different major style, but each variation eventually has the same overall purpose. The detail information is explained as follows:

**Argumentative Essay.** Hogue and Oshima (2006) present that “an argumentative essay is an essay in which you agree or disagree with an issue, using reasons to support your opinion” (p.142). The aim of this essay is to convince the reader that someone’s opinion is right. Argumentation is a common kind of essay because it makes students think on their personal argument. They should take a defense on an issue, support their defense with understandable reasons, and support their reasons with strong evidence.

**Comparison/Contrast Essays.** Meyers (2003) found that the following a comparison is showing how people or things are the same. A contrast shows how people or things are different, usually to evaluate both of them and comparison-contrast paragraph discusses both similarities and differences. Comparison and contrast is a very common model in most academic fields. Comparison/Contrast essays aim to explain the similarities and the differences between two items.

**Cause and Effect Essay.** According to Hogue and Oshima (2006), “in a cause/effect essay, someone discusses the causes (reasons) for something, the effects (results), or both causes and effects” (p. 94). Cause and effect essays aim to identify why something happen (causes) and what happens as a result (effects).

### **Difficulties in writing academic essays**

Writing is a skill that is necessary for many contexts throughout life.

Writing is one of the most important parts of education, and it is needed both for students and for teachers. However, on academic writing sometimes several difficulties may appear and makes the students struggle to keep academic writing standards that are acceptable. Ghabool (2012) mentioned that the writing assignment is challenging because there are so many realistic and theoretical issues are included. It shows that on writing academic essay, it is need to use some theories which are related to the writing topic. Pineteh (2014) further indicated the major weaknesses in students writing such as lack of a mastery of academic writing rules, ability to research and relate knowledge across singular context, and poor sentence skills. Those things are the major problems that are usually faced by students on writing an academic essay.

The use of formal language and doing proper paraphrasing and quotation sometimes also becomes problems in writing academic essay, it because some students felt hard to do it. In academic writing, it is a must to use formal language rather than informal language, and some students may feel hard to distinguish it. It is supported by Pineteh (2014) that students often struggle to change from informal writing style that they often use to the more controlled and more conventional formal academic style. In writing, students of course need to support their ideas with other theories, but it is sometimes also a problem for some students to do a proper paraphrasing. Lecturers always complain about the lack of knowledge and particular skills which are needed for academic writing related with non-native speakers of English, these skills are outlining,



paraphrasing, and summarizing (Al-Shabanah, 2005). Improper paraphrase could become a plagiarism. Pecorari (2003) asserted that plagiarism is considered as a terrible crime within the academic field. Thus, for avoiding the plagiarism the students should pay more attention in taking someone's idea in their writing.

Lack of vocabulary, technical writing error and grammar mistake are also the problems regarding to writing an academic essays that are faced by the students. Some students may have problem with vocabulary mastery, and this lack of vocabulary somewhat correlates to the study by Rabab`ah (2003) who found that the students cannot state their ideas freely and accurately because of their limited vocabulary mastery. Technical writing error and grammar mistake also become the common problems which are faced by students in writing academic essay. Alşabaeva (2011) stated that one of the common mistakes that every student does is about grammar problems, such as errors in grammar, and punctuation. Furthermore, the problems especially happen for non-English speaking students. Inadequate of English language proficiency is the main reason of plenty of difficulties that ESL learners have in their writing tasks (Ghabool, 2012). Expressing ideas in the form of writing is not easy because the writer should elaborate the idea well. Adas and Bakir (2013) found that most of the students faced the difficulty of stated their ideas well because several the problems are the lack of both the adequate stock of English vocabulary and creativity in writing.

### **Strategies to solve the difficulties in writing academic essays**

Writing is one of the important skills in education. However, in writing process, some problems may appear. Some students may confuse to decide the topic when they want to write an academic essay. Whitaker (2009) suggests think about something related to the lessons that the students are interested in. If there is nothing which interests, look through the textbook, course slides, handouts, and current periodicals for possible ideas. By reading many kinds of literature, it can help the students to find out the best topic for their essay.

Plagiarism will create moral problems for students and it can have serious consequences for them. If students want to put someone's idea in their writing they need to citing or paraphrasing it. Oshima and Hogue (2006) stated avoid plagiarism students must do the citation which is put quotation marks around words or sentence that they copy exactly. Then, Oshima and Hogue define that students can also do indirect quotations which are writes indirectly the writer's word with their own sentence or it called paraphrase.

Poor sentence knowledge also always has been a problem for students. Herrero (2007) found that the reading habit could help students achieve both reading and writing skills. The texts present outstanding opportunities for discussion, and journal entries can help students advance their writing skills, since by reading students could look the sample of sentence structure and perhaps it can help them to improve their sentence knowledge. Finding out the suitable journals for the resources in writing academic essays sometimes is also hard for students, and it becomes another problem in writing an academic essay. According to Belt, Mottonen, and Harkonen (2011), they said that journals exist for varying subject

fields, if it is difficult to find a suitable one, try to find the journal that is suitable to research which is conducted by the students.

### **Review of related study**

Many studies have been done about students' difficulties in writing academic essays. One of the studies is a study carried out by Al-Khasawneh in 2010 with the title "Writing for Academic Purposes: Problems Faced by Arab Postgraduate Students of The College of Business, University Utara Malaysia." This study aimed at investigating the academic writing problems faced by postgraduate students of the Arab postgraduate students of the College of Business at University Utara Malaysia and to provide solutions to these problems. This study used a qualitative approach and the researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data. The result of this research showed that the students faced problems in relation to vocabulary register, organization of ideas, grammar, spelling, and referencing.

Another is research conducted by Pineteh in 2014 with the title "The Academic Writing Challenges of Undergraduate Students: A South African Case Study." This research investigated the academic writing challenges that are faced by undergraduate students, and the researcher also investigated why the students challenged by academic writing. This research used qualitative research method to collect empirical data from both students and lectures. The result of this study revealed that academic writing challenges faced by students are consequences of students' linguistic and general literacy background.

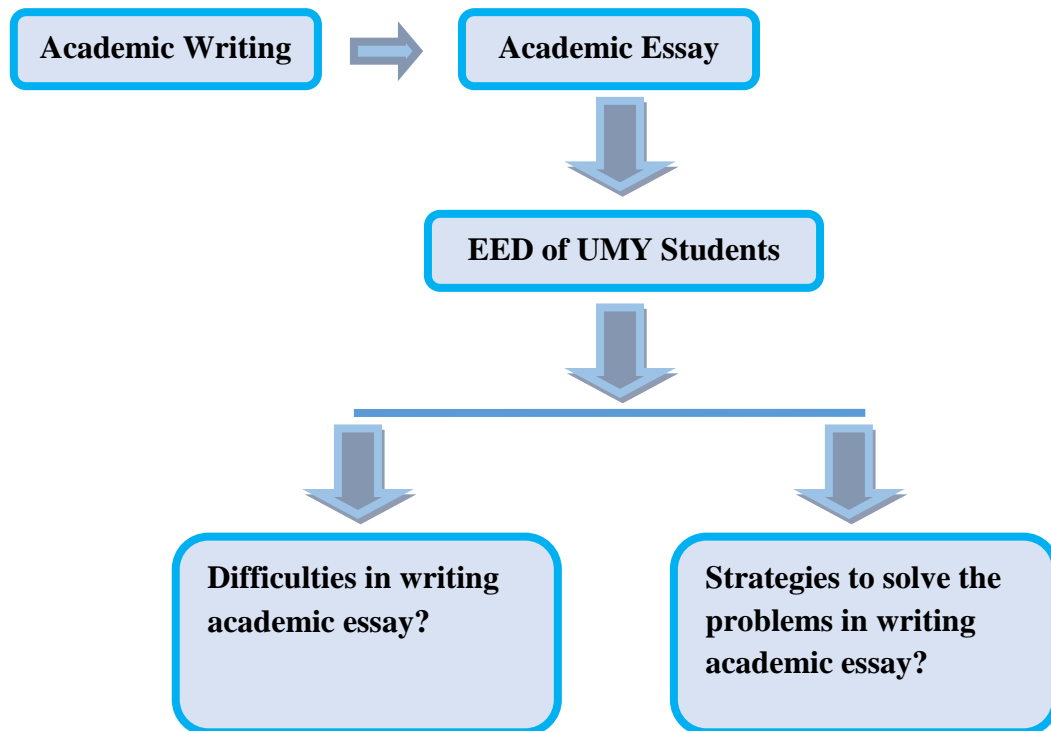
Both researches that have been done about students' difficulties in writing academic essays used qualitative method. It is the same method that is used by the

researcher in conducting this current study, so that the researcher can adopt the methodology from those researches. Another similarity from both research and this current study is from the participants. The participants from both research are non-native speakers of English so that the researcher can compare whether the problem that is faced by those participant are the same or not with this current study. The differences between the researcher study and these two studies are from the participants. The participants of the first study are business students, and the participants of the other related study are engineering students, while the participants of this current study are pre-service teachers (English education students).

### **Conceptual framework**

Academic essay is a part of academic writing. It is usually assigned to fulfil the requirement of university course. All the theories above explain what academic writing and academic essay are. However from all of the explanations above, there are some difficulties in writing academic essays. The difficulties are difficult to find related theories, lack of a of mastery academic writing rules, ability to research and relate knowledge across singular context, poor sentence skills, using informal language, improper paraphrase, plagiarism, limited vocabulary mastery, mechanical writing error and grammar mistake and inadequate of English language proficiency. These difficulties also are faced by English Education Department Students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (EED of UMY).

Beside the difficulties the theories above also discuss the strategies to handle the difficulties, such as reading a lot, doing proper paraphrase and finding the suitable journal article.



*Figure 2. Conceptual framework*