



Investigating the Students' Method in Writing English Academic Essay

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the methods used by students in writing academic essays in English. This research is motivated by the importance of academic essays writing skills in the context of higher education, particularly in English as an international language. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method, involving several English language study program students as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations of the writing process, and analysis of written essay documents. The results showed that students used various methods in the writing process, such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising. However, there were significant differences in the effectiveness of each method used, depending on linguistic background, previous writing experience, and understanding of academic essay structure. This study concluded that structured training and ongoing guidance are essential to systematically improve students' academic essays writing skills. These findings are expected to serve as a reference in developing academic essays, writing curricula, and teaching strategies in higher education.

Keywords: Academic Essay Writing, Students' Writing Methods, Writing Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a fundamental skill required at the university level, serving as the primary medium for students to express their understanding, critical thinking, and research findings. Academic writing includes various forms of writing, such as essays, reports, research papers, and theses, which demand not only language mastery but also the ability to organize ideas in a structured and coherent manner. However, for many students, mastering academic writing is a significant challenge. Some research shows that college students often face difficulties in various aspects of academic writing, including grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion, and correct citation practices. This difficulty is further exacerbated for students whose first language is not English, as they face additional linguistic and cultural barriers.

Previous studies have highlighted that Students often have difficulties in planning ideas and revising texts, especially in academic contexts".(Taye & Mengesha, 2024) Academic writing is a very important skill for college students, as it serves as a means of communicating knowledge, ideas, and arguments in a systematic and structured manner. However, many students face challenges in academic writing, such as difficulties in formulating coherent arguments, using the right language, and organizing writing in accordance with applicable academic rules. According to Hyland (2003), academic writing requires a deep understanding of the genre and structure of academic texts, which is often an obstacle for students who are not well exposed to this style of writing.(Subandowo, 2025).

Like the problems faced by students in the 5th semester of the English study program at the Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University Bengkulu, in writing academic essays many students experience difficulties and are not ready to face these expectations due to gaps in previous education. This unpreparedness often leads to frustration, decreased academic achievement, and a lack of confidence in their ability to communicate effectively through writing. Investigating the challenges that university students face in academic writing is essential to understand the underlying factors of such difficulties. Identifying these challenges can help educators, curriculum designers, and institutions to implement more effective teaching strategies, support systems, and resources in improving students' writing skills. "The importance of understanding the structure and characteristics of certain academic genres, such as essays, to improve students' writing skills." Swales (1990).

By investigating the challenges that students experience in academic writing, focusing on common barriers, their causes, and potential solutions. This research is expected to contribute to increasing academic success and student confidence in writing. Writing skills are one of the important skills in the academic world, especially at the university level. Not only is it a tool to assess students' understanding of a topic, but also to train critical thinking, analytical, and the ability to express ideas in writing.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach, using a descriptive qualitative study design. Descriptive design is used to understand students' experiences in writing academic essays. Students who were matriculated at UINFAS Bengkulu in the fifth semester of the English study program participated in this study. There were 43 students, consisting of 15 men and 28 women from the English Study Program at UINFAS Bengkulu. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the research sample.

This study used several instruments to collect data. The main instrument is interviews conducted with students and researchers to collect qualitative data regarding their experiences and perceptions of writing academic essays. Interviews will be conducted with open-ended questions that explore the challenges faced by students in various aspects of academic writing, such as language mastery, writing structure, time management, and understanding of academic writing formats.

The data collection process in this research will be conducted systematically through several techniques, namely interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Interviews will be carried out with students using open-ended questions to explore the challenges they face in academic writing, such as difficulties in developing academic arguments, using references and citations, mastering academic language and grammar, and other factors affecting their writing ability, including motivation, time management, and stress. In addition, questionnaires will be distributed to obtain broader and more in-depth information regarding the students' experiences and perspectives. The questionnaires will contain descriptive and reflective questions and will be conducted through online platforms such as email or Google Forms to enable efficient data collection from a large number of respondents. Furthermore, documentation techniques will be used by analyzing relevant documents, including books, scientific articles, reports, archives, and samples of students' academic assignments such as essays, reports, or research articles. These various data collection techniques are expected to provide comprehensive and credible findings for the research.

The data analysis technique in this study was conducted through qualitative procedures using thematic analysis proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). The data obtained from interviews, questionnaires, and documentation were analyzed through several stages, including coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring themes and patterns related to students' academic writing challenges. In addition, data triangulation was

applied by comparing findings from different data sources to ensure the validity and credibility of the research results.

RESULTS

The researcher used questionnaires as an instrument. This was done by distributing questionnaires to 23 students of the English Study Program (semester IV) in the UINFAS BENGKULU academic year 2024/2025. The questionnaire contains 50 items designed to ascertain students' perception of essay writing against their writing skills.

Then, the total number of responses is statistically calculated. The researchers used the following frequencies to investigate students' perceptions of the writing community in terms of improving their writing skills, both positive and negative. In this study, the researcher distributed questionnaires to students of the English Study Program in the fourth semester of the 2024/2025 academic year.

Each response to a statement in the questionnaire was given a scale value based on the Likert scale, i.e. "Always," which has a value of 5, "Often," which has a value of 4, "Sometimes," which has a value of 3, "Almost Never," which has a value of 2, and "Never," which has a value of 1. The researchers found five indicators of students' perception of the writing community in terms of improving their writing skills based on their responses to the questionnaire.

Table 1. Questionnaire

No	Aspects	Indicator	Questions	Score			
				4	3	2	1
				SD	A	TH E BA TT LE	D
1.	Interests and Motivations	1. Planning	1. I always make a plan before I start writing academic essays.	-	28	14	1
			2. I make an outline (outline) before writing an essay.	-	28	12	3
			3. I gather ideas first before writing.	-	34	9	-
			4. I look for references from various sources before writing.	-	26	15	2
			5. I understand the topic of the essay well before I start writing.	-	29	11	3
			6. I determine the purpose of writing an essay before writing.	-	28	14	1
			7. I identify the target reader before writing the essay.	1	26	12	4
			8. I prepare a list of keywords before writing.	1	28	10	4
			9. I feel the planning stage is important in writing an academic essay.	-	27	16	-
			10. I often skip the planning stage because I want to write right away.	1	16	5	21
2.	Ease of Understanding and Use	2. Developing ideas and Organization	11. I wrote the first draft without thinking too much about the mistakes.	2	18	5	18
			12. I try to pour all my ideas into the first draft.	-	35	4	4

			13. I wrote the first draft in English without translating from Indonesian.	2	19	7	15
			14. I often have trouble starting the first paragraph in writing an essay.	-	28	3	12
			15. I write a draft following the structure of the essay (introduction, body, conclusion).	-	30	11	2
			16. I use topic sentences in every paragraph.	1	29	5	8
			17. I write freely to flow my ideas.	1	31	6	5
			18. I find it easy to write the first draft of an essay in English.	2	27	6	8
			19. I use academic references when drafting.	-	37	6	-
			20. I often put off writing because I don't know where to start.	2	21	6	14
3.	Benefits in development	3. Revising and Editing	21. I reread my writing after finishing the first draft.	-	33	10	-
			22. I added a new idea when I made revisions.	1	33	6	3
			23. I removed the section that was not relevant to the topic during the revision.	-	31	10	2
			24. I improved the paragraph structure when revising.	-	29	12	2
			25. I clarified the main idea in each paragraph during the revision.	-	30	10	3
			26. I ask a friend or lecturer to give me input before finalizing the essay.	-	28	13	2
			27. I compare my writing with examples of academic essays.	-	32	9	2
			28. I feel that revisions help improve the quality of my writing.	-	30	12	1
			29. I often skip the revision stage due to time constraints.	2	17	6	18
			30. I enjoy the revision process because it can correct my mistakes.	-	33	8	2
4.	Challenges and difficulties	4. Vocabulary	31. I check grammar after writing an essay.	-	30	13	-
			32. I check spelling and punctuation before putting together an essay.	-	29	14	-
			33. I use tools like Grammarly or Google Docs to check for errors.	1	33	8	1
			34. I corrected non-academic vocabulary errors	1	32	9	1
			35. I read my essays out loud to find mistakes.	1	21	4	17
			36. I check the clarity of sentences in each paragraph.	1	29	12	1
			37. I make sure the transitions between paragraphs go smoothly.	1	30	10	2
			38. I rechecked the citation format and the bibliography.	-	32	9	2
			39. I feel that the editing stage is very important in writing an academic essay.	-	31	10	2
			40. I rarely edit because I feel that my writing is good enough.	3	17	6	17

5.	Collaboration and Interaction	5. Language use	41. I find writing academic essays in English difficult.	-	25	6	12
			42. I have trouble developing ideas into complete paragraphs.	-	28	3	12
			43. I often run out of vocabulary when writing essays.	1	30	4	8
			44. I have trouble using correct grammar when writing.	2	24	6	11
			45. I easily lose focus when writing long essays.	1	16	6	10
			46. I find it easier to write if there are examples of essays that can be used as references.	-	30	9	4
			47. I write better when I have enough time.	0	29	8	6
			48. I feel confident in my essay writing skills.	1	33	3	6
			49. I want to continue to improve my academic writing skills.	-	32	9	2
			50. I feel writing an academic essay helps me think more critically.	-	32	11	-

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the planning indicator shows a very high percentage. As many as 97.7% of respondents stated that they agreed and strongly agreed with statements related to planning activities before writing academic essays. The high percentage of respondents in the category agree and strongly agree shows that the level of implementation of planning indicators is in the high category. This indicates that most students have a good awareness of the importance of planning before writing an academic essay in English. Students tend not to write directly, but first design the purpose and flow of the writing. These findings are in line with the theory of the writing process put forward by Harmer (2004) and Oshima and Hogue (2007), which states that planning is a crucial first step in academic writing. With careful planning, writers can develop ideas more systematically and produce more effective academic essays.

With the ability of students to develop the main idea clearly, compose coherent paragraphs, and organize academic essays systematically starting from the introduction, content, to conclusion. The development of good ideas and organization is very important in academic writing because it determines the clarity of the argument and the reader's comprehension (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Based on the results of the questionnaire, the indicators of developing ideas and organization showed a high percentage level, as many as 100% of respondents gave a positive response. The high percentage number in the category of agree and strongly agree shows that the level of implementation of developing ideas and organization indicators is in the high category. This indicates that students are generally able to develop the main idea into a cohesive paragraph and organize ideas logically in writing an English academic essay.

Interviews conducted with four fifth semester students at UINFAS Bengkulu, namely Febiana Puspitasari, Ikta Aliansa, Lisa Novela, and Chantika Dhea. The interview aimed to explore students' perceptions, experiences, challenges, and the impact of academic essay writing in English. Interview questions focused on students' understanding of academic essay writing, their experiences during the writing process, the difficulties they faced, and the influence of academic essay writing on their English skills.

Based on the interview findings of the total four participants interviewed, 50% described most students using methods (brainstorming), outlining, and drafting in writing

academic essays, while the other 50% emphasized feedback from lecturers and rewriting exercises as important strategies in improving academic essay writing skills. Regarding their writing experience, 100% of respondents found the process of writing an academic essay fun. However, 50% face the main difficulty faced is in organizing ideas and using grammar correctly., 25% struggle with using reading- and translation-based methods as a way to find and develop ideas., and another 25% mention time management as a challenge. As for the impact on language skills, 50% of respondents stated that regular practice in writing academic essays significantly increased their confidence in writing and speaking English in other contexts.

These findings reveal that students face technical challenges (i.e. limitations in grammar mastery)) and non-technical problems (time management). Nevertheless, their overall experience with academic essay writing was positive and enjoyable. The Impact of Academic Essay Writing Skills in Other Language Contexts: Ikti Aliansa noted that writing academic essays in English is quite fun because during writing essays the vocabulary in her during arguments. Similarly, Lisa Novela experienced the immediate benefits of writing essays, which increased her confidence in speaking English and in grammar (grammar). This shows that writing academic essays in English not only strengthens students' writing abilities but also positively affects their speaking skills and overall confidence in using English.

Discussion

These findings reveal that writing academic essays in English plays an important role in improving English language skills among college students. It shows that students apply several main methods in writing academic essays in English, which generally include the planning, drafting, and revising/editing stages. In the planning stage, most students start the writing process by determining the topic, purpose of writing, and drafting an essay framework. This stage helps students organize the main ideas and supporting ideas before they are poured into written form.

The planning stage carried out by students supports Harmer's (2004) theory which states that planning helps writers determine the goals, audience, and structure of the writing so that ideas can be conveyed in a more directed manner. Students who plan well are able to produce more organized essays than those who write directly without preparation. Thus, planning has an important role in improving the quality of academic essay writing. This finding is in line with the theory of the writing process which states that the ability to develop and organize ideas is the core of the quality of academic writing, Harmer (2004).

The next component of writing is vocabulary. According to the findings of previous research, students had a positive perception of vocabulary with a percentage of 80.25%, indicating that vocabulary has a very high perception. Vocabulary is important in writing a text because the reader will receive the message from the text through the words that have been written. Based on Long and Richard quoted in Maisal Rahmadi, vocabulary is important in writing because writers can convey the message they write through the vocabulary they use. Based on the previous theory, it is possible to conclude that a good vocabulary selection is very important in writing.

In addition, based on the results of the students' questionnaire, it was found that in the writers' community, they learned to choose the appropriate vocabulary based on the context of the sentence. Students in the writing community learn new vocabulary in writing, making it easier for them to develop their ideas. They can also reduce the repetition of the same vocabulary in a paragraph as their vocabulary develops. We can see from the results of the questionnaire that is processed that academic essay writing can help students improve their writing, including improving their vocabulary. Students with a variety of vocabulary will find it easier to construct sentences. This is supported by Andrew Taylor's opinion that the choice

of vocabulary is a sign that the author has adopted a particular societal discourse and that a good job depends on the accuracy of the vocabulary chosen by the author.

The last is the language use indicator related to the ability of students to use the English structure appropriately in writing academic essays, which includes grammar, sentence structure, the use of tenses, and the suitability of sentence forms to the academic context. The proper use of language is very important because it affects the clarity of meaning and readability of academic essays (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2004). Based on the results of the questionnaire, the language use indicator shows a high percentage level. As many as 89.8% of respondents responded positively to statements related to the use of language in writing academic essays. This indicates that most students have been able to use the English structure quite well in writing academic essays, although there are still a small number of students who have difficulties in the aspects of grammar and sentence structure. These findings are in line with the opinion of Brown (2007) who states that mastery of grammar is an important component of academic writing skills. The use of proper language allows the writer to convey ideas clearly and reduces ambiguity in the writing.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that students use various methods in writing academic essays in English, such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising and editing. However, the effectiveness of the application of these methods still varies between individuals. Some students show a good understanding of the structure of academic essays and are able to apply writing strategies systematically, while others still have difficulties, especially in organizing ideas and using academic English appropriately.

Factors that affect the success of the method used include background knowledge of academic writing, habits of reading academic texts in English, and previous writing experience. In addition, the lack of intensive guidance and the lack of structured training are also obstacles in the development of students' writing skills.

Therefore, a more targeted and sustainable approach to teaching is needed, such as explicit writing strategy training, constructive feedback, and increased access to academic writing resources. Thus, students can be more confident and skilled in producing good academic essays that are in accordance with international standards.

Recommendations Based on the Research Findings:

1. For Students:

Students are advised to be more active in exploring various methods of academic writing, such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising sequentially and consistently. Students also need to improve the habit of reading academic texts in English to enrich their vocabulary and understand good writing structures.

2. For Lecturers or Lecturers:

Lecturers need to provide more intensive training and guidance related to academic writing strategies. Teaching should not only focus on the final result of the writing, but should also emphasize the writing process, from planning to editing. Providing regular constructive feedback is also important to help students identify weaknesses and improve the quality of their writing.

3. For Educational Institutions:

Higher education institutions should provide supporting facilities such as writing centers, academic writing workshops, and access to relevant digital and print learning resources. The curriculum also needs to be designed to include comprehensive and continuous learning of academic writing skills.

4. For future researchers:



Further research is suggested to expand the number of participants and cover more diverse educational backgrounds so that the results of the research are more representative. In addition, follow-up studies can also examine the influence of psychological factors such as confidence or anxiety in writing on the choice of students' writing methods.

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