Investigating the Students' Weaknesses in Writing Academic Papers

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ABSTRACT

Academic writing skills are an essential thing that must be mastered by students. This research investigated the weaknesses of postgraduate students of Arabic Language Education (ALE) of the Indonesian University of Education (IUOE) in writing scientific journal articles. This study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 25 postgraduate students, interviews, and document studies. After conducting the analysis and discussing the data gained, the results showed that 75% of the students found that it was challenging to write scientific journal articles. One of the reasons is that they are not familiar with the differences between scientific journal articles and other scientific papers. Besides, 78% of them have problems with linguistic elements, such as cohesion and coherence, and 63% are not familiar with the ethics of scientific publications in writing journal articles.

Keywords: Academic paper, cohesion, coherence, genre

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing skills are important components that must be mastered by students. Karim and Mursitama (2015) explained that writing produces a product that shows the quality of one's learning. In addition, writing skills are the primary language skills and the ultimate result of language skills. Further, McCrimmon (1976) states that writing is an activity to explore thoughts and feelings about a subject, to choose the topics to write and to determine how to write them so that the readers understand them easily and clearly.

This is in accordance with Nalliveettil and Mahasneh (2017) which emphasizes that writing skills are high-level skills and cannot be obtained naturally. Therefore, in writing special and intensive exercise is needed in communicating the message referred to in writing into written papers.

Nowadays, many students think that writing is something difficult so that they have less motivation and assume it as something unimportant (Ismail & Elihami, 2019). Lack of motivation in students is the cause of the lack of students' interest in writing (Rahmiati, 2015). This also becomes an obstacle for students in producing such papers, especially scientific papers. Thus, the students do not have such a strong desire to develop their own talents.

As the agents of change, the students have to develop their competence through education and teaching. The teaching and learning processes in the context of the implementation of science, technology, and skills are carried out in the form of activities aiming to improve the quality of students aiming to produce beneficial outputs and outcomes to education. One of the competencies students must have is to convey scientific information related to various useful thoughts and research (Ismail et al., 2018).

Scientific papers are a very useful outcome. This is in line with the regulation of the Directorate General of Higher Education (2015), regulating graduation at each level of education, pointing out that bachelor's degree holders must produce scientific papers that can be disseminated in scientific publications.

Writing scientific papers is an absolute requirement for students who will graduate from higher education and as a form of implementing the *tridharma* (the three pillars) of higher education (Adhikara et al., 2014). One of the requirements for obtaining an academic degree is

that the students must write scientific papers in the form of scientific journal articles published in national or international journal institutions. However, the requirement is sometimes seen as a tough task and something frightening. It might be because the competence in writing scientific journal articles is still less than required. Thus, the culture of writing scientific journal articles must be encouraged since the first semester and it is expected that the students will know the importance of the culture of writing scientific journal articles.

Further, Yanti et al. (2018) emphasizes that with the ability to write academically, especially scientific journal articles, students' imagination will be sharper, language mastery increases, and it increases self-confidence because they are able to create. She also adds that nowadays it is not uncommon that the results of writing are to be used as an aspect of assessment when someone applies for a job.

Moreover, several studies on academic writing, especially among students, have been conducted, among them by Altinmakas and Bayyurt (2017). In their research, they discussed the factors influencing undergraduate students in Turkey in the practice of academic writing in English. In addition, in his research, it was also confirmed that their academic achievement was determined by the scientific articles they wrote in English.

In addition, Septa (2017) conducted research related to strategies in increasing students' interest in writing skills. The results of his research explained that in increasing students' interest in writing scientific papers it might be through research studios. Research studios are carried out to introduce students to the world of research so that they do not have difficulties in the future when working on scientific works.

Al-Mukdad (2019) in his research discussed the problems faced by Arab International University students in writing academically in English. The results of his research indicate that students tend to perceive that all aspects of academic writing are difficult. The reason is that they do not recognize the difference between academic English writing and the lack of background knowledge about academic writing.

Based on the results of the researchers' identification, it is clear that previous studies are limited to examining the internal domain described by the extent to which students' English academic writing skills.

In contrast with the previous studies, this study focused on analyzing the problems of postgraduate students of Arabic Language Education (ALE) of Indonesian University of Education (IUOE) in writing scientific journal articles in Arabic viewed from the linguistic aspects and the obstacles they experience in writing journal articles.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted at the Department of Arabic Language Education master program, Faculty of Language and Literature Education, Indonesia University of Education. This research used qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach. It was so because the researchers wanted to explore descriptive phenomena related to the students' weaknesses in writing journal articles in Arabic.

Furthermore, data collection was carried out through distributing questionnaires to 25 ALE IUOE postgraduate students, interviews, and document study. The document study materials referred to in this research is a journal article that was written by students. All data obtained from data collection techniques analyzed in stages by reduction, classification, and codification of data. Triangulation of data obtained from all data sources was carried out to compare data obtained from text analysis (journal articles), questionnaires and interviews and at the same time ensure whether all data tended to lead to the same conclusion. This is intended to confirm and validate the research conclusions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As aforementioned, that The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Education issued regulations related to scientific work that must be produced by students sharing educational programs, namely Regulation of the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Number 50 of 2018 concerning Amendments to the Regulation of the Minister of Research and Technology, and Higher Education Number 44 of 2015 on National Higher Education Standards. This is also reinforced by a letter circulated by the Director-General of Higher Education No. 152 / E / T / 2012 concerning compulsory scientific publications for undergraduate, second, and third undergraduate students.

On that basis, writing journal articles is a must for ALE IUOE postgraduate students. Apart from being a requirement for graduation, writing journal articles is also useful for students in deepening their understanding of lecture materials and preparation exercises for final assignments (theses).

Regarding writing journal articles, ALE IUOE postgraduate students must master the internal aspects that support the publication of journal articles, including interest and motivation. Besides, students are also required to be familiar with and understand the house style of journal institutions and linguistic elements such as cohesion and coherence (see Figure 1 for the detailed explanation of the students' problems in writing scientific papers).

3.1. The difficulties in writing scientific papers

Based on the results of a questionnaire distributed by researchers to 25 respondents. Researchers found that 75% of ALE IUOE postgraduate students find it difficult to write journal articles. It was caused because of a low reading culture or lazy reading, so they have difficulty finding ideas that are used as writing. Besides, low motivation, objectivity of assessment, and limited references are also one of the causes of student difficulty in writing scientific articles.

1) Laziness

One of the obstacles most often experienced by students in writing scientific papers is feeling lazy to start writing. This is reflected in the results of interviews with students as follows:

In my opinion, the first factor that causes students to find it difficult to write journal articles is the laziness factor. The feeling of being lazy that is often experienced by students is lazy looking for ideas, reading, and starting to write.

Besides, respondents also added:

In my opinion, the obstacle I face is not having the courage to write. In writing, don't get it wrong, because if it's wrong, the reader will be ridiculed and laughed at.
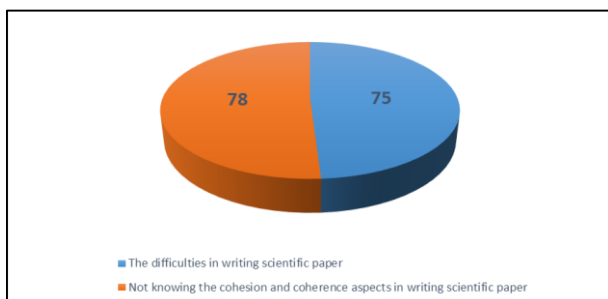

Figure 1 The students' problems in writing scientific papers.

Thus, unmotivated students, resulting in a feeling of being lazy to write, is one of the central themes raised by

respondents. In general, respondents from the interview stated that the difficulty they faced from within was laziness to write. No matter how small the reason, it has become a trigger for laziness in him. Not only laziness, but lacking self-confidence is also among the obstacles that many respondents put forward as obstacles to carrying out an activity including writing activities. The feeling of laziness and lack of confidence seems to be a unity that exists in students as a result of their low motivation, thus that effort to carry out writing activities is not the main issue.

Regarding the laziness in writing scientific articles, it is different from the results of research conducted by Saman and Bakhtiar (2018) showing that laziness in writing scientific articles is because the writing culture has turned into a copy-paste culture causing the students to not being motivated and be lazy to write their own ideas. Concern and awareness to learn, to write, and make their own analysis are considered as something insignificant. It makes the students have less interest in writing. Most of the students do not understand the importance of writing in their daily life.

2) Difficulty in finding ideas

According to respondents, the feeling of being lazy to write is due to losing ideas as a result of insufficient reading. Reference as material for writing is very influential in finding ideas for writing. This is proven by several examples of respondents' quotations as follows;

A small number of students read books or references, so they don't get ideas to write which makes students lazy to write. I personally lose ideas, don't know what to write about. Maybe because I'm lazy to read.

Thus, it is difficult for students to find ideas, due to a lack of motivation to write because they are not interested in writing activities. In addition, they tend to prefer activities that are entertainment in nature rather than sitting still and thinking about something to find writing ideas. These obstacles seem to be a "big package" in hindering efforts to create scientific papers. Mawardi (2009) states that the difficulty of starting writing is due to a lack of understanding and mastery of scientific writing patterns, so many people argue that they have great difficulty in starting writing. Another thing that is the cause is also because of the many ideas lodged in the mind so that they are not able to issue them.

Furthermore, it is confirmed by the results of a study conducted by Nurhaliza et al. (2019) emphasizing that the factors causing the lack of ideas are due to the influence

of cellphones and television making the students' reading interest switch to watching.

3) Inexperience and Lack of view in writing journal articles

Another internal obstacle raised by students during interviews is a lack of experience and insight in writing journal articles so that students become constrained in writing journal articles. This is confirmed by questionnaires data distributed by researchers to 25 respondents. Researchers found that 78% of ALE IUOE postgraduate students do not have journal articles published by journal institutions. Other than that, researchers also found that 63% of ALE IUOE postgraduate students did not know the ethics of scientific publications in writing journal articles. Because, based on the results of the interviews, the majority of them have no experience at all in submitting articles to national and international journal institutions and the lack of information they get.

Further, regarding the lack of insightful experience in writing articles, Rahmiati (2015) adds that it should be supported by the academic community to address these problems. This is a challenge for all parties, especially lecturers, how the students are able to gain experience and insight in writing articles. It might be done by holding such seminars and so on.

a. Linguistic Problems of ALE IUOE Postgraduate Students in Writing Journal Articles

A journal article is said to be complete and perfect if contains unified and integrated components. The components that develop the coherence of the essay are the aspects of cohesion and coherence. Cohesion is an integrated relationship between one sentence form and another, while coherence is a logical relationship or meaningful relationship between one sentence and another. According to Alwi, et al. (2003), cohesion is a relationship between propositions which is expressed explicitly by the grammatical and semantic elements in the sentences that make up discourse. Cohesion consists of grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion or lexical relationships. Cohesion in discourse is not only determined by coreference, but also by lexical relationships. Halliday & Hasan (1976) also argued that cohesion consists of two parts, namely grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. The grammatical cohesion aspect consists of reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Lexical cohesion consists of repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy,

collocation, and equivalence. Lexical cohesion consists of repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, collocation, and equivalence.

Despite, coherence is the acceptance of a speech or text because of its semantic coherence (Kushartanti, 2009). Keraf (1997) also defines coherence as a relationship between text and factors outside the text based on one's knowledge. Therefore, coherence is one of the most important, fundamental and decisive aspects of discourse. Readers can easily understand and follow the author's thoughts, if a sentence does not contain errors in the placement of the words.

However, based on the results of research through document studies in Arabic journal articles written by ALE IUOE postgraduate students, researchers found that 78% of students found issues with cohesion and coherence aspects. Problems related to cohesion include conjunction, substitution, and repetition.

Conjunction

Conjunctions are elements of grammatical cohesion that connect one lingual unit to another in an essay or discourse. The elements that are combined can be in the form of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

The following is an example of an Arabic sentence that does not match the conjunction aspects in a journal article written by ALE IUOE postgraduate students.

منزلة المعلم في فكرة التربية الإسلامية محترمة ومكرمة فمكانته بين مجتمعه عالية ورفيعة جدا فهو العالم والورع وذو قدوة حسنة. يأخذ المعلم دورا رئيسيا في تطوير التعليم في المدرسة.

The position of the teacher in the idea of Islamic education is very respectable so that his position in the community is very high because he can be said to be a pious scholar and give a good example. Teachers play an important role in developing education in schools.

From the two Arabic sentences above, the researcher did not find the conjunctions used by the author to connect the elements of the lingual units in one sentence with another sentence. The two sentences in Arabic should have been corrected to

منزلة المعلم في فكرة التربية الإسلامية محترمة ومكرمة فمكانته بين مجتمعه عالية ورفيعة جدا فهو العالم والورع وذو قدوة حسنة. لذلك يأخذ المعلم دورا رئيسيا في تطوير التعليم في المدرسة.

The position of the teacher in the idea of Islamic education is very respectable, so that his position in the community is very high, because he can be said to be a pious scholar and give a good example. Therefore, teachers play an important role in developing education in schools.

From the two sentences above, a conjunction should be added لذلك after the first sentence. It works to connect the first sentence with the second sentence.

Repetition

Repetition is an element in lexical cohesion in the form of repeated use of the form, either in whole or in part, in a sentence or in clusters of sentences in a paragraph or discourse. In the narrative or text, repetition serves to emphasize the elements that are repeated (Keraf, 1980). However, in the essay that is used as the object of this study, the use of repetition elements is still not appropriate in Arabic-language articles written by postgraduate students of Arabic Language Education (ALE) of the Indonesian University of Education (IUOE). The following is the examples of repetition.

يجب على المعلم في المدرسة امتلاك المهارات اللغوية لأنّ المعلم في المدرسة مربي وميسر

A teacher, teacher at a school is required to have language skills because teachers at school are educators and facilitators.

The repetition of the phrase المعلم في المدرسة above makes the sentence even more ineffective and more inclined towards the Indonesian translation, even though the purpose of the repetition is to emphasize elements that are considered as something important. It is in line with Itaristanti's (2016) study emphasizing that the repetition in scientific writing as in the example above violates the principle of saving words.

The Arabic sentence should be corrected to:

يجب على المعلم في المدرسة امتلاك المهارات اللغوية لأنّه مربي وميسر

A teacher at a school is required to have language skills, because teachers at school are educators and facilitators.

In the sentence above, the phrase لأنّ المعلم في المدرسة is changed into لأنّه that the function is to save words and maintain Arabic *żauq* (feeling).

Substitution

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976) substitution is the restoration of an element of discourse with other elements whose terms remain the same, in terms of inter-word relationships, or other forms that are bigger than words, such as phrases or clauses. Based on the results of the document study, researchers found problems related to the aspect of substitution in Arabic journal articles written by ALE IUOE postgraduate students. The

following is an example of using an incorrect substitution.

لأنها عنصر من عناصر تعلم تعلم البلاغة يجب أن يسبق تعلم قواعد اللغة العربية اللغة العربية.

Studying *balāgah* should begin with learning Arabic rules first, because Arabic rules are one of the components of learning Arabic.

In Arabic, the phrase لأنها in the sentence above contains the pronoun هي (*muannas*/feminim). The use of the phrase لأنها in the sentence above is not correct, when it refers to the phrase تعلم قواعد اللغة العربية, because in fact the phrase تعلم قواعد اللغة العربية contains meaning (*muzakar*/masculine). Hence, after the phrase تعلم قواعد اللغة العربية should use the phrase لأنه which contains the pronouns هو (*muzakar*/masculine), so that it is clear and appropriate.

Furthermore, the coherence aspect. Coherence is a logical relationship between one sentence and another sentence in an essay or discourse. The following is an example of an incoherent relationship in an Arabic journal article that is the object of this research.

تعلم البلاغة يجب أن يسبق تعلم قواعد اللغة العربية لأنها عنصر من عناصر تعلم اللغة العربية. و كتاب العمريطي هو كتاب من كتب القواعد الذي كتب باللغة العربية و شرح القواعد بالنظوم الكثيرة.

Studying *balāgah* should begin with learning Arabic rules first, because Arabic rules are one of the components of learning Arabic. Al-Imriti is one of the grammar books written in Arabic and describes the rules with many structures.

The two sentences above suggest that there is no relationship between the first sentence and the second sentence. Because, in the first sentence the writer tells about *balagah*. while in the second sentence, the author explains more about the Arabic *qawaid* book.

Those are some analyzes related to the problems of ALE IUOE postgraduate students in writing journal articles on internal aspects of students as well as aspects of cohesion and cohesion. Apart from the elements of cohesion and coherence, the researcher also analyzed language errors, which included inaccuracies in punctuation, word usage, and errors in writing Arabic letters.

4. CONCLUSION

Postgraduate students of Arabic Language Education (ALE) of the Indonesian University of Education (IUOE) who participated in the process of making Arabic journal articles experienced many challenges and obstacles as the findings in this study. Internal or internal barriers included laziness, lack of self-confidence, lack of

understanding and insight in writing journal articles, difficulty finding ideas, and difficulty starting. In addition, students also often experienced the problems in writing journal articles related to linguistic aspects namely; cohesion and coherence.

In line with the results of this study, the researchers found that 75% of the students encountered difficulties in writing scientific journal articles. One of the reasons was that they did not understand the difference between scientific journal articles and other scientific papers. In addition, 78% of them had problems related to linguistic elements, such as cohesion and coherence, and 63% did not know the ethics of scientific publications in writing journal articles.

Further, this study provides affirmation and suggestions to the lecturers so that in every Arabic teaching and learning process, it is urgent for lecturers to emphasize on the skills of writing good and correct scientific journal articles to the students. Therefore, it is recommended for further studies to examine the strategies in writing scientific journal articles in Arabic properly.

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