

Students' Perceptions Towards Autonomous Learners Concept in Academic Writing Classes: Sequential Mixed-Method

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed learning patterns, especially in the field of academic writing. The characteristics of students being autonomous learners are essential to survive in a disruptive period, especially in education. This study aims to determine students' perceptions regarding independent learner attitudes. Sequential mixed-method was used in this study using descriptive analysis and narrative inquiry. Participants involved in this research were students from a university in Papua. The results of data analysis show that students have an awareness of the importance of being independent learners even though they still feel comfortable relying on lecturers to explain in learning. This research implies that the University must issue policies to maintain quality standards of learning to create conditions for students to become independent learners.

Keywords: *academic writing, academic reading, autonomous learner, sequential mixed-method, COVID19*

1. INTRODUCTION

Research proposals as part of a thesis have quite different work characteristics than assignments that students have experienced so far. The research proposal acts as a blueprint, conceptually a document containing an outline of the research plan for conducting a research project [1]. The research proposal is part of a thesis which is a scientific work produced by students. Writing a scientific paper in the form of a thesis involves producing a substantial work that generally ranges from 15,000 words, which is the first experience of undergraduate students to do types of assignments with a complicated level of difficulty [2]. In addition, writing scientific papers is carried out independently outside of the classroom by working under supervisors' guidance by selecting topics and working independently [3]. With the characteristics of assignments that have a high level of difficulty and are different from previous assignments, writing a research proposal requires students to be able to choose research topics and work independently, guided by a supervisor.

Writing a research proposal as a scientific work puts great pressure on students. Writing scientific papers is not fun because its complexity will lead to frustration

[4]. Writing scientific papers has always been problematic because it requires students to carry out their assignments independently with a tight deadline to complete them [2]. Moreover, writing scientific papers such as determining research topics, making outlines, writing drafts, making revisions, and finalizing are complex stages that require intellectual and managerial skills [5]. The lack of student experience in writing scientific papers will burden students mentally because of the complex nature of scientific work with various activities, tight deadlines, and intellectual and managerial abilities.

With a lack of experience in writing scientific papers, students come with confusion regarding what topic to research at the time of writing a proposal. The problem will be complicated when students do not know what to do in making a research proposal. Knowledge of academic writing in the form of understanding to write research proposals has not been fully developed in students' abilities. Students in general know the components in a research proposal, but they are not sure they have the ability to make the components in a research proposal correctly [2]. Moreover, writing is a difficult activity that involves a special thought process and a disciplined attitude [6].

Writing a research proposal requires self-readiness to be willing to study and work in a disciplined manner. Writing is not a simple process because it involves several abilities [7]. Students who have found their research topic will even be confused about being on the right writing path [3]. The situation gets worse if the University or department has poor performance in lectures or related to the writing process [6]. Students need to be aware of and improve with their study habits and assignments that have been carried out because writing a research proposal is not a simple matter. Writing a research proposal involves a variety of abilities to be able to find the right path to complete a research proposal.

Students need to transform the view that reading is not seen as a threat but as a necessity. The function of reading is divided into two purposes: to read with communicative purposes, which aims to get the information needed or get pleasure, and to read with academic goals that aim to increase knowledge, develop abilities, and consolidate knowledge with new knowledge [8]. Academic reading is defined as an activity carried out by students to read various types of texts such as articles, journals, reports, reference materials, textbooks, descriptions, theses, and opinions [9].

Reading comprehension included in academic reading will mature with appropriate and continuous training that goes hand in hand with the growth of knowledge, experience, and motivation [10]. On the other hand, academic reading skills will increase students' success rate in lectures [11]. To be successful in an academic life in which there are various texts with a variety of different academic discourses, students must have an understanding that they need academic reading skills which this ability is obtained by continuous proper practice so that students benefit in the form of knowledge, experience, and abilities in the discipline.

Academic reading ability is formed by understanding the concept of academic reading and allocating sufficient and continuous time to be exposed to various types of academic texts. Academic reading is a variety of strategies that are used appropriately to read shared texts that fall into certain disciplines [12]. Reading academic texts is not seen as merely an act of reading but also involves predictive ability to choose a reading source and knowing the purpose of reading the text [13] which is used to get main ideas, specific concepts, patterns and signs of academic discourse, to the intent and attitudes of text writers [14].

Academic reading ability is formed from internal and external factors. Internal factors are formed through students getting sufficient exposure from scientific disciplines, and external factors are formed through institutional action in adjusting the form of courses to learning objectives [10]. Furthermore, specific patterns

of behaviour differentiate between novice readers and expert readers where novice readers tend to use the same reading strategy in different fields while expert readers apply different types of strategies that are tailored to the reading source [10, 15]. Students who have become expert readers have past knowledge of a topic so that they have more understanding at a higher cognitive level [16, 17]. The ability to read can be improved by reading learning that is explicitly taught, assessed, and supported through institutions [18].

Research related to academic reading has continued to grow in recent decades. [19] identified that academic reading requires special attention because its mastery requires a complex process in which there are multiple layers of ability. Other research also underlines the importance of academic writing for the academic life of students who should be studied more in the context of classroom learning [20]. In addition, students also critically assess that classroom learning is the main way to acquire academic writing skills because there is no academic reading learning that will equip them with knowledge in student disciplines [21]. Another finding shows that vocabulary mastery contributes significantly to academic critical thinking skills [22]. So far, there has not been enough research on the topic of academic writing that explores the dimensions of students as independent learners. By investigating the dimensions of independent learners, it is hoped that this study can provide information from different points of view related to academic writing.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

The sequential mixed-method was employed in this study which combined quantitative and qualitative data analysis, namely descriptive statistical analysis and narrative inquiry. The researcher conducted a descriptive statistical analysis in the form of frequency followed by narrative inquiry analysis by presenting critical incidents. The method was chosen with the aim of providing a comprehensive picture of student perceptions regarding the concept of an independent learner.

2.1 Research Participant

This study took participants from one of the universities in Papua. Researchers used simple random sampling to two departments, namely English education and English literature in academic writing class. The number of respondents involved was 20 students who filled out the questionnaire and four students participated in the interview season. Students use anonymous names when filling out the questionnaire and also when conducting interviews.

2.1 Data collection and analysis

There are two types of data obtained from this study: student responses to questionnaires and interview transcripts. The research instrument was adapted from previous research [23] that focused on the concept of autonomous learners. The quantitative instrument uses a five point Likert scale with 16 items of questions using responses in the form of strongly disagree (1) - strongly agree (5). On the other hand, the researcher conducts structured interviews with students with five questions. The researcher was coded the transcript (S1) for subject one and F/M for the gender. Furthermore, in conducting quantitative data analysis, the researcher uses SPSS 23 program. Meanwhile, to perform qualitative data analysis, researchers used the Nvivo 11 program.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

1. Quantitative Analysis

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

No.	Response	Mean	S.Dev
1	Lecturers are the only parties responsible for learning.	4.09	1.31
2	Lecturers are the only parties responsible for making students smart.	4.09	1.31
3	Lecturers must make students motivated.	4.82	0.39
4	Lecturers must encourage students to become independent learners.	3.82	1.27
5	Lecturers must foster student attitudes regarding being responsible for learning.	4.18	1.19
6	I prefer lecturers to explain rather than study independently.	4.09	1.16
7	I prefer the concept of lecturers playing a role in teaching knowledge rather than students having responsibility for learning.	3.73	1.29
8	I don't think motivation from myself is important in college.	2	0.85
9	I feel that students do not need to have the initiative in college.	2	0.85
10	I feel that students need less interest/concern for learning.	2	0.74

11	I feel uncomfortable if I have to ask the lecturer directly.	1.27	0.45
12	I think that students do not need to bother exploring ways to increase their knowledge/abilities.	1.73	0.75
13	I would instead give up than have to be patient with a long and arduous learning process.	1.36	0.48
14	I think that the ability to analyze, evaluate, and plan to increase the knowledge possessed by students is a waste of time.	1.64	0.48
15	I will feel lazy if I have to solve problems by learning independently.	1.82	0.72
16	Being an independent learner is only burdensome for students because they have to be more responsible and work hard.	1.64	0.64

2. Qualitative analysis

What are the conditions related to students becoming independent learners in learning?

"Students must always study independently because students are only given material and lecturers never explain. Lecturers only give and students must study on their own." (S1-M)

"Most of the lecturers only submit material and students have to study on their own. There is an inconvenience if the course is difficult so that students are confused because there is no explanation of the difficult material." (S2-M)

"Lecturers give a lot of assignments and students just tell them to do it themselves. Students only come together, but lecturers make it easy to get good grades" (S3-F)

"I am not comfortable with lecturers who only give assignments and suddenly give good grades without any correction" (S4-F)

To what extent are students motivated to learn independently?

"Because the lecturer only provided material to be studied by myself, I felt completely unmotivated." (S1-M)

What learning methods are most suitable for lecturers to do?

"If I choose a lecturer to use the lecture method, it is explained directly by the lecturer, because it can understand more than independent study." (S1-M)

"I chose the lecture method rather than self-study students because it is clearer and easier to understand." (S3-F)

"I prefer the discussion method rather than the lecture because I usually play on the smartphone behind my lecture. I am more comfortable discussing and discussing lessons with friends" (S4-F)

Who is more responsible for making students brighter?

"In my opinion, it is a shared responsibility. Only sometimes there are students who do not want to be smart" (S2-M)

"Both lecturers and students have a shared responsibility to make students smart" (S4-F)

Do students feel comfortable asking the lecturer?

"I prefer to ask friends to ask questions, because sometimes if I ask the answer from the lecturer, it is not clear enough" (S4-F)

3.2 Discussion

Simple statistical analysis is used to analyse the qualitative data obtained. Table 1 shows an overview of students' perceptions regarding independent learners. One thing that stands out in the table is that students assume that they must become independent learners even though they do not do this in practice. On the other hand, students believe that lecturers have the main role to be responsible for teaching students. Meanwhile, the method of learning by lecturing is preferred by students because students feel independent learning to be more difficult to do.

Qualitative analysis was also carried out through several questions posed to participants. Some things that can be of concern are that students are forced to become independent learners because lecturers have low responsibility. Students are left to study on their own because lecturers tend to be less serious in teaching. Which then students also get good grades easily even though they don't try hard.

This research underlines the importance of being independent learners for students. One of the advantages of being independent learners is that students will be able to solve problems critically and develop new thinking strategies, both convergent and divergent [24]. In addition, other findings also show that independent learners will support students' self-esteem which correlates directly with learning outcomes [25]. Furthermore, self-esteem also influences success in academics, where the range of academic success is

influenced by the fluctuation of student self-esteem [26].

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore students' perceptions regarding being independent learners quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis shows that students build perceptions of being independent learners. They believe in the importance of being independent learners in learning even though in practice, they prefer lecturers to take the main role in learning. Furthermore, in qualitative analysis, students show several important points, including that they must become independent learners because the lecturers are not teaching them optimally. The surprising thing here is that lecturers tend to act less professionally by giving good grades for free. This study implies that there is a need for managerial improvements to the teaching system and the quality of the lecturers. Institutions must issue policies in the form of training to issuance of regulations to maintain the quality of learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers wish to express their gratitude to Rector and Dean of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Musamus for their assistance and facilities during the study.

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