Understanding Postgraduate Students' Research Article Publishing Challenges in Indonesia

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Abstract—In an ever-evolving academic publishing landscape, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) postgraduate students face distinct challenges and opportunities in the process of research article publication. This study aimed to meticulously identify the hurdles these students encounter in prestigious public universities in Central Java and Yogyakarta. Leveraging a qualitative narrative research approach grounded in academic publication theories, insights from ten postgraduate scholars across English and Indonesian majors were gathered through open questionnaires and focus group discussions. The methodology facilitated a collaborative setting for data validation and exploration of students' experiences. Findings underscore that students are actively leveraging feedback and rejection as essential tools for reflection and learning, showcasing an affinity for technological advancements. It is discerned that the readiness to embrace modern tools is integral in cultivating research competence. The study advocates for educational institutions to nurture this preparedness by fostering a culture rooted in extensive literature reviews and theoretical comprehension, thereby encouraging original contributions in academic discourse and enhancing the quality of research outputs. This research, therefore, champions adaptive, technologically adept, and literature-rich academic environments for the upliftment of EFL postgraduate students in research publication.

Keywords—*academic writing; research article; EFL; narrative inquiry; challenges*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the rigorous and multifaceted ecosystem of academic publication, scholars endure stringent protocols of peer review and editorial scrutiny, a process quintessential in affirming the rigor, relevance, and originality of scholarly works; an endeavor that stands pivotal in the advancement of academic individuals, notably emphasized in contexts such as Indonesian educational spheres where publishing is crucial for lecturers to escalate in their functional positions [1], [2]. This dynamic landscape, branched into various disciplines, harbors a plethora of specialized outlets that foster the dissemination of knowledge, extending from niche to interdisciplinary arenas and facilitating vibrant scholarly dialogues globally.

Herein, EFL postgraduate students find themselves embroiled in a labyrinth of hurdles as they strive to adeptly navigate the confluence of research literacy and academic writing proficiency, aiming to sculpt published artefacts amid this expansive cosmos. The journey, observed through a critical lens, reveals nuanced dynamics and relationships interlinking academic writing competencies and research literacy with the publishing trajectory, a trajectory further delineated through analyses of syntactic complexity variations in research article introductions by diverse echelons of writers, and asserting the significant contributions qualitative research articles proffer to the

knowledge base despite their relatively restrained publication rate [3], [4]. This investigative foray seeks to elucidate the intricate dynamics underlying the challenges besetting EFL postgraduate students, venturing to demystify the complex interdependencies and thereby nurturing a fertile ground for navigating this scholarly pinnacle with enhanced adeptness and insight.

Situated centrally in the scholarly endeavor is academic writing, a meticulous endeavor where nuanced thoughts find articulation in a structured tapestry forged with evidence-based arguments, precise terminology, and logically orchestrated discourse, aligning firmly with the stringent formalisms delineating this intellectual sphere [5], [6]. This medium facilitates the conveyance of intricate concepts, inciting intellectual discourses characterized by a grounded, impersonal tone and a symbiotic exploration of uncharted territories in the realm of knowledge, thereby contributing vitally to the augmentation of the existing scholarly repository. Recognizing the pivotal role of academic writing in fostering nuanced thinking in academia, it becomes imperative for postgraduate programs to accentuate a needs-based curriculum, orienting towards catering to the precise requisites of the students, a sentiment echoed strongly in various studies that advocate for a meticulous nurturing of writing skills to equip individuals in effectively organizing a plethora of social beliefs and engendering transformative shifts in individual lives [7], [8]. Furthermore, it is pertinent to acknowledge the escalated challenges perceived particularly in fields such as engineering sciences, necessitating an enhanced focus on alleviating the writing hurdles in these domains [9].

Research literacy, functioning as a critical compass in the scholarly journey, cultivates a repository of interdisciplinary and transferable skills, thereby empowering individuals to adeptly navigate the labyrinthine avenues of academic publishing. [10] underscore the pivotal role of teacher agency in nurturing research literacy, advocating for the enrichment of teacher education programs to foster such proficiency. This endeavor is echoed by [11] who highlight the requisite of incorporating information literacy courses across educational strata, and by [12] who envisage the propagation of academic literacy through pioneering pedagogical models. Central to research literacy is the cultivation of a discerning approach to the articulation, assessment, and synthesis of scholarly content, facilitating the creation of compelling narratives that delve profoundly into the multifaceted dimensions of research queries. Furthermore, [13] delineates the scope of educational research literacy, portraying it as the bedrock for accessing, comprehending, and critiquing educational research while fostering capabilities to undertake meticulous research in educational contexts. Consequently, the scholarly discourse urges a concerted focus on nurturing research literacy, viewing it as a beacon guiding individuals in crafting and communicating groundbreaking insights through a cultivated prism of understanding.

In the intricate landscape of academic publication, EFL postgraduate students encounter a plethora of challenges stemming from stringent fluctuating standards across diverse journals and disciplines, necessitating not merely scholarly aptitude but a sophisticated grasp of the multifaceted publishing environment marked by specialized niches and interdisciplinary intersections [6], [14]. This domain, a formidable force characterized by hegemonic discourse dictating adherence to precise forms and styles, renders academic writing a Herculean endeavor, often replete with trials unique to this demographic, thus highlighting a significant gap in the existing discourse. Recognizing the central role academic writing plays in higher education, and grounding in the essential frameworks of educational research literacy which entails proficient access, understanding, and evaluation of research initiatives in an educational ambiance [13], it emerges as imperative for the scholarly community to delve deeper to unearth the underlying impediments in their publication journey. This endeavors to foster a richer comprehension and consequently, the cultivation of enhanced support and guidance systems, ensuring a trajectory less encumbered and more navigable for these scholars in their pursuit of academic articulation and publication.

This study is situated precisely at this juncture, seeking to delineate the contours of the challenges faced in the academic publication journey of EFL postgraduate students. By casting a spotlight on the intricate interplay between academic writing and research literacy within the broader schema of academic publishing, this research endeavors to foster a discourse that is both rich and grounded, nurturing a foundation that can potentially empower EFL postgraduate students to navigate the complex world of academic publishing with enhanced proficiency and confidence. Through this lens, the study articulates a firm commitment to not only understanding but actively bridging the chasms that hinder the path to academic publication for EFL postgraduate students.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

In the dynamic landscape of academic publishing, a critical conduit for disseminating scholarly research, interdisciplinary approaches are increasingly gaining ground, necessitating nuanced navigation [1], [3]. It emerges that the scrutiny of research article (RA) introductions witnesses variations in syntactic complexity between emerging and veteran international publication writers, hinting at a sophisticated narrative in the scholarly discourse [15]. Despite a slower publication rate, qualitative RAs are discerned to hold a comparable contribution to their quantitative counterparts in enriching the field's knowledge base, as underscored by citation analyses [3]. Moreover, the fluctuating review standards, influenced by diverse factors including a journal's focus and publisher norms, delineate the critical paths in the scholarly publishing sphere [2]. The analysis underscores the pivotal role of academic publishing in augmenting scholars' functional positions, particularly spotlighting the indispensable role of lecturers in Indonesia [1]. This analysis draws a compelling argument for the evolving norms and expectations in

academic publishing, emphasizing a critical evaluation of syntactic complexity and the increasing inclination towards interdisciplinary approaches.

Synthesizing the existing research on EFL postgraduate students' encounters with academic publishing unearths a multifaceted landscape. A critical analysis of the various studies elucidates the symbiotic relationship between research literacy and academic writing in steering the academic publishing process. Previous research largely converges on the notion that research literacy, characterized by adeptness in identifying and synthesizing pertinent literature, significantly influences the quality of academic writing, thereby impacting the acceptance rate in peer-reviewed journals.

Dissecting further, it becomes evident that the different demands and standards set by various academic publications pose a considerable challenge to EFL postgraduate students. The dynamic nature of academic publishing, with journals harboring distinct and sometimes intersecting focus areas, necessitates a robust understanding and adaption to varying publishing standards. Previous research accentuates the critical role of guidance in navigating these divergent paths, thus suggesting a rich avenue for fostering research literacy amongst EFL postgraduate students to enhance their publishing success rate.

Research literacy, a crucial component in bridging knowledge gaps, encompasses a diverse range of skills vital in the research process. These competencies, ranging from crafting detailed search inquiries to efficacious synthesis of existing content, foster a culture of lifelong learning grounded in judicious resource utilization and consultation with field experts. [16] advocate for nurturing research skills to bolster academic literacy through innovative paradigms. Notably, research literacy extends to proficient engagement with prevailing research documentation, with an emphasis on producing research narratives that rigorously and persuasively shed light on elements of EAP practice [17]. Moreover, [13] delineates educational research literacy as the capacity to not only grasp and critique educational research endeavors but also to aptly design and execute research within educational milieus. In synthesizing the perspectives offered, it is evident that research literacy is pivotal in enhancing the adeptness in navigating and utilizing the sprawling landscape of academic resources, positioning it as a linchpin in the scholarly discourse and exploration, thereby underscoring the imperative to cultivate such proficiency through nuanced and innovative educational approaches.

Academic writing, characterized by its formal and evidence-based approach, plays a pivotal role in the intricate machinery of academic publication. This style of writing, characterized by its meticulous selection of terminology, logical argumentation, and a neutral tone, serves as a foundational component facilitating readers' comprehension and fostering scholarly discourse [18]. It demands a precise articulation of ideas, providing the cornerstone for rigorous academic conversations and a prosperous scholarly journey. Furthermore, the significance of academic writing extends beyond the realm of publication, as it is a fundamental skill imperative for students in higher education, aligning with the standards of college and university writing assignments [19]. Academics who grasp the nuanced intricacies of academic writing practices can enhance their confidence and innovative capabilities in their scholarly endeavors [19]. However, it is noted that many university students lack proficiency in structuring academic texts, highlighting a need for focused attention on this skill [20]. For postgraduate students, academic writing serves as a valuable avenue for honing English writing skills, further accentuating its importance [21].

Moreover, studies have underscored the stringent requirement of formal style in academic writing as a significant barrier faced by EFL postgraduate students. The impetus on evidence-backed arguments and logical coherence demands a deep-seated understanding of the nuances of academic writing, which often poses hurdles for these students. Moreover, the expectations of precise wording and impersonal tone further augment these challenges, bringing to the fore the pressing need for intensive training in academic writing to facilitate smoother navigation through the publication process.

Recent studies underscore the pivotal interconnection between research literacy and academic writing, spotlighting the substantial influence that competencies harbored within research literacy— such as the adept formulation of research inquiries and the discernment of authoritative sources— wield over academic writing [5], [18]. This confluence suggests that enhancing research literacy could be instrumental in strengthening academic writing faculties, thus elevating the potential of academic publication successes for EFL postgraduate students, a prospect further corroborated through innovative pedagogical models that aim to cultivate academic literacy [16]. The accentuation on bolstering teacher agency, envisaged to play a central role in fostering research literacy, brings to fore strategies channelized through teacher education initiatives, portraying a structured pathway towards enriched research literacy [10]. Moreover, there is a consensual emphasis on the crucial role of mentorship and collaborative scholarly ecosystems in mitigating the intricacies of the academic publishing sphere, establishing a smoother trajectory and potentially escalating the publication triumph rate for these students, thereby carving a roadmap anchored in communal guidance and seasoned insights from academia's veterans.

Upon scrutinizing the extant literature, a noticeable gap emerges in the contextual exploration of the interdependence between research literacy and academic writing in the academic publishing trajectory for EFL postgraduate students. While the existing research delineates the individual challenges posed by academic publishing and the requisite skills in research literacy and academic writing, a concerted exploration of how these variables interrelate and influence the publishing success rate remains substantially uncharted.

Identifying the aforementioned gaps serves as a springboard to carve a niche focused on a holistic exploration of the interconnected dynamics between research literacy, academic writing, and the academic publishing process. This study seeks to fill this void by unraveling the intricate tapestry of challenges faced and strategies employed by EFL postgraduate students in their academic publishing journey. The overarching purpose is to foster a rich understanding of the symbiotic relationship between research literacy and academic writing and their combined influence on enhancing the academic publication success rate for EFL postgraduate students, thereby facilitating targeted interventions to support them in this critical academic endeavor.

Moreover, the present body of work offers limited insights into the personal experiences and narratives of EFL postgraduate students in navigating the academic publishing maze. First-hand accounts and qualitative explorations that delve deep into the lived experiences of these students, providing a nuanced understanding of the obstacles they face, and strategies they adopt remain conspicuously scant, thus highlighting a significant research gap.

III. METHOD

A. Research Setting and Design

The setting for this research encompasses five renowned public universities located in the educational hubs of Central Java and Yogyakarta. It draws from a targeted group of postgraduate students enrolled in linguistics and language education programs, which span English and Indonesian majors. The participants were meticulously chosen based on their academic journey, particularly emphasizing those in their second semester with a proven track record of research article publication in national or international journals. This study facilitated the involvement of ten postgraduate scholars, evenly distributed between master's and doctorate levels, promoting a balanced perspective in the resultant narrative.

Opting for a qualitative research paradigm, this study leverages the narrative research strategy to capture and explore the authentic experiences of the participants in penning research articles. This choice is fortified by the persuasive argument that life-based narratives foster a profound understanding of real events beyond mere constructs or abstractions [22]. Furthermore, this strategy allows for an intricate analysis through the lens of narrative inquiry, translating personal experiences into valuable data sets that go beyond surface-level opinions or abstractions [23].

B. Data and Data Sources

The research predicates on a narrative strategy, striving to delineate a vivid spectrum of experiences through both primary and secondary data. The primary data, garnered through open-ended questionnaires and focused group discussions, engender a rich, experiential narrative from the participants. On the other hand, secondary data mined from academic supervisors offer a complementary perspective, enhancing the objectivity and comprehensiveness of the research findings.

C. Data Collection Technique

Employing a purposive sampling approach, the research orchestrates a multifaceted data collection blueprint. Initial outreach through a well-curated open questionnaire, grounded in the theories of academic publication, set the stage for deeper exploration through focus group discussions. These discussions, spanning multiple locations including Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and Semarang, served as a collaborative forum to validate preliminary data insights, encouraging a harmonized understanding from different vantage points.

D. Trustworthiness

Underlining the research is a stringent adherence to the principles of triangulation involving method, theory [24], [25], and researcher perspectives to uphold the trustworthiness of the data. This is materialized through a collaborative analysis involving participants and their respective academic supervisors to review and validate the findings. This rigorous approach ensures that the research paints a holistic narrative, reflecting the multi-faceted challenges and strategies in article writing from a grounded and credible standpoint.

E. Data Analysis Technique

Building upon the foundations laid by [26], the narrative research strategy pivots around crafting coherent and validated story frameworks from the participants' narratives. This meticulous process unfolds through successive stages of story collection, element-based analysis, and chronological representation, aiming to echo the true essence of the participant experiences in a structured and comprehendible manner.

IV.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Through a careful analysis of the narratives from both students and lecturers, a cohesive understanding of the challenges of research article publication emerges. From the data analysis, we can classify several major themes that posit challenges for research article publication of EFL postgraduate students as follows:

A. Feedback and Rejection

The majority of participants agreed with the statement that receiving feedback or rejection from the target journal serves as a pivotal point for reflection and refinement of their articles. Students exhibit an open acceptance towards the feedback and rejections, using them as opportunities to improve their work based on the feedback received. As Student 1 and Supervisor 1 mentioned:

> When I experience rejection, … looking for another suitable journal with my research. However, if I get feedback or response via email or something else, then I will make revisions according to the instructions in my article rise. (Student 1)

> Ask students to carefully pay attention and understand all feedback and ensure students revise according to the reviewer's suggestions (Supervisor 1).

B. Recent Trends and Developments

Students engage in a variety of methods, including leveraging technology (Google Scholar and Scopus notifications) and attending seminars, to keep themselves updated with the latest trends and research in their field. This proactive approach ensures the contemporaneity and relevance of their work. Lecturers complement this by fostering familiarity with Scopus indexed journals and encouraging students to engage with the latest publications. As Student 2 and Supervisors 1-2 remarked:

> Reading articles published in journals … I checked the menu where the journal would provide notification if it published a volume newest. In this way, I still remain updated with research issues in the field of linguistics, especially pragmatics (Student 2).

> Introduce them to journal database storage platforms such as publish or perish or Scopus.com and explains the journal filter feature based on topic and latest year (Supervisor 1).

> Directing students to take part in webinars related to the latest trends in their fields and direct them to frequently read published articles from reputable and popular journals in the field (Supervisor 2).

C. Novel Contributions and Theoretical Rigor

Both the students and lecturers emphasized the necessity of bringing forth new theories and insights in their respective fields. Students undertake exhaustive literature reviews, construct matrices to identify research gaps, and ensure the relevance and novelty of their research. Lecturers, on their part, recommended consulting a substantial number of primary books (at least 30) and journal articles, both in English and Indonesian, to build a strong theoretical foundation. Student 2 and Supervisor 3 mentioned:

> ... read the study from my research to ensure how far the study had historically gone. Then after discovering the novelty of the theory I connected it to the impact or significant contribution to the development of the theory of this study (Student 2).

> Triggering further research to solve problems for which no solution has been found so far. New theories can help improve previous theories that may not be appropriate with the problems currently faced (Supervisor 3).

D. Journal Guidelines and Peer Review

A common practice among the students revolves around meticulously studying the writing and author guidelines provided by the target journal. This involved analyzing previously published articles in the potential publication outlets and engaging in peer reviews. Lecturers supplement this by guiding students to identify research gaps through the study of various articles and fostering an understanding of the scope and objectives of prospective journals. The practice of referring to a wide range of materials seems to be a recurrent theme, fostering a deeper understanding and adherence to the established norms of the targeted journal. For example, Student 2 and Supervisor 3 noted:

> I double-checked manually the template for writing articles in the journal or by checking the format of the articles that had been published in the journal. Regarding the number of words, I checked the features in Microsoft Word (Student 2).

> I will do online tutoring to ensure that the student's articles will be submitted is in accordance with the provisions of the journal it is intended for. If it doesn't fit, I will direct students to revise before submitting (Supervisor 3).

E. Plagiarism and Ensuring Authenticity

A unanimous theme centered on the strict avoidance of plagiarism to maintain the authenticity of the writing. Students undertake paraphrasing, both manually and with the aid of AI tools like QuillBot, to craft original content. As an example, Students 3, Student 6, and Supervisors 5-6 stated:

> Ensure that no similar research has ever been conducted. Write citations using the correct procedures. If possible, I use plagiarism checker software such as turn it in (Student 3)

> To avoid plagiarism and ensure authenticity in my work, I paraphrase many sentences from the sources I take. In paraphrasing, I usually change the sentence pattern from active to passive and vice versa and replace the words in the sentence with synonyms. If I quote the source sentence directly, I also ensure that I use the correct citing technique (Student 6).

> I just do a Turnitin check and after that ask the students to revise the section which needs to be paraphrased. I also give an example by paraphrasing 1 or 2 sentences that are considered plagiarism. Apart from that, I also provide examples of citing and making references correctly (Supervisor 5).

> Suggests the use of technology-based tools such as Quillbot (a paraphrasing app) and Grammarly (Supervisor 6).

F. Discussion

This study aimed to delineate the challenges EFL postgraduate students face while attempting to publish their research articles, drawing from narratives of both students and lecturers. Key themes emerging from the data are the roles of feedback and rejection, staying abreast with recent trends and developments, the requirement for novel contributions and theoretical rigor, adherence to journal guidelines and peer reviews, and the vital imperative of averting plagiarism to preserve the authenticity of the work. Our findings unveil a dynamic yet rigorous landscape where students actively engage with feedback, utilize modern tools to remain updated with trends, and uphold the sanctity of original content, thereby navigating the complex pathway to publishing with a sense of preparedness and responsibility.

Comparing the current results with previous studies showcases a considerable alignment, especially regarding the pivotal role of feedback and the rigorous approach towards maintaining originality, seen universally across the academic spectrum [27]–[29]. However, our study goes a step further, offering a nuanced understanding of how technology and modern tools are leveraged proactively by students to stay updated with recent research development [30], [31], indicating a heightened awareness and adaptability among the contemporary cohort of EFL postgraduate students, which perhaps signals a broader change in academic engagements.

The unifying sentiment of students using feedback and rejection as reflective tools could potentially be seen as an adaptive mechanism [32]–[34]. These findings suggest that the process, albeit challenging, is seen as constructive, which mirrors a maturity in understanding the iterative nature of scholarly publications. There is, therefore, a definite need for structured platforms where students can receive constructive feedback, thus fostering a culture of continuous improvement and learning [35].

In addition, the emphasis on novelty and theoretical rigor manifests the understanding of the necessity for original contributions in academic discourse. These results provide further support for the hypothesis that a robust foundation in literature review is imperative, urging educational institutions to advocate for comprehensive approaches to literature reviews and theoretical grounding [36], [37], fostering a research environment ripe with fresh perspectives and novel insights.

In a practical sense, the adherence to journal guidelines and engagement in peer reviews echo the prerequisites for successful publication. Greater efforts are needed to institutionalize workshops or seminars that elucidate the dynamics of journal guidelines and the nuances of peer reviews[38], enhancing students' prospects of steering their manuscripts successfully through the rigors of publication.

Despite illuminating the multifaceted challenges and strategies undertaken by EFL postgraduate students in the publication process, the present study harbors limitations. Being anchored to narratives could potentially spotlight subjective experiences over a broader statistical analysis, thus necessitating further research involving a larger demographic and varied methodologies to foster a well-rounded understanding of the experiences of EFL postgraduate students in the realm of research publication. This would further augment the depth of insight and potentially unveil more stratified strategies and challenges.

V.   CONCLUSION

The study at hand successfully delineates the manifold challenges that EFL postgraduate students encounter in the complex milieu of research article publication. A conspicuous observation from the research is the active engagement and dynamic approach adopted by students to adhere to the stringent demands of academic publishing.

Importantly, the results underline the integral role of feedback and rejection, portraying these not as setbacks but as vital tools for reflection and learning. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the necessity for structured platforms where students can obtain constructive feedback, advocating for an academic environment that promotes continuous improvement and nurtures a mature understanding of the publication process.

As the discussion progresses, it mirrors a broader change in academic engagements characterized by a heightened sense of adaptability and awareness among EFL postgraduate students. The readiness to utilize modern tools to keep pace with current trends signifies a cohort well-versed in leveraging technology, hinting at the promising prospect of fostering research competence through technological optimization. Educational institutions ought to take note and encourage the adept use of such resources, which would invariably lead to research outputs that are contemporaneously relevant and well-grounded in the latest developments.

On another pertinent note, the findings reinforce the imperative of sustaining a rich foundation in literature review to engender original contributions in the academic discourse. It is therefore incumbent upon educational institutions to foster a culture that values comprehensive approaches to literature reviews and theoretical groundings. Such an approach would invariably lead to a research environment teeming with fresh perspectives and nuanced insights, thus elevating the quality of academic contributions by EFL postgraduate students to unprecedented heights.

Despite its in-depth analysis, this study is not without limitations, chiefly stemming from its reliance on narratives, which may tilt towards subjective experiences rather than offering a broader statistical insight. This manifests a pressing need for further research encompassing a larger demographic and varied methodologies, to offer a more rounded perspective on the experiences of EFL postgraduate students in the domain of research publication. Amplifying the depth and scope of the research in this manner can potentially unearth more stratified strategies and challenges, thus providing a roadmap for a more informed and fortified approach to research publication in the future. The undeniable consensus emerging from this study is the clarion call for an enhanced support system grounded in adaptability, technology, and comprehensive understanding, guiding EFL postgraduate students towards a successful and enriching publication journey.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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