Guidance and Technology in Harmony: Unearthing EFL Postgraduate Students and Supervisor Strategies in Academic Writing

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Abstract **In the dynamic realm of academic writing, the strategies adopted by EFL postgraduate students and their supervisors play a crucial role. This study aims to unearth the complex tactics utilized in academic writing, accentuating the role of structured mentorship and modern technology in achieving authentic and original research articles. Undertaken in pre-eminent universities in Central Java and Yogyakarta, the qualitative inquiry hinged on the narratives of ten postgraduate students, drawing data from open-ended questionnaires and validated through focus group discussions. The findings reveal that mentorship, enriched with technological integration, fosters a harmonious blend of guidance and autonomous critical thinking, assisting students in pinpointing theoretical gaps and selecting suitable methodological approaches. The study illustrates a recurrent strategy: meticulous crafting of pivotal sections of research articles under seasoned supervision to preserve originality. The research propounds a learning paradigm where technology and guidance are intertwined, promoting adept navigation through research and writing processes. It beckons a future enriched with modern tools integrated into the curriculum, paving the way for qualitative enhancement in research dynamics grounded in authentic, original contributions.**

Keywords—academic writing; EFL; postgraduate; narrative inquiry

I. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of academic progression, mastery in academic writing emerges as a pivotal element, dictating the trajectories of scholars globally and notably facilitating the discourse in higher education realms [1] and echoed in the sentiments of other scholars [2]. This intricate art form, characterized by an impersonal tone and a carefully curated lexicon, enables individuals to critically engage with various societal beliefs, facilitating transformative changes in their lives. For EFL postgraduate students, this journey is often marked by distinctive hurdles stemming from varied linguistic backgrounds and multifaceted learning encounters [3]. The pivotal role of English in this context cannot be understated, serving as the dominant conduit for scholarly dialogues globally [4], thus emphasizing the critical necessity for adherence to specific, nuanced forms and styles in academic writing.

Navigating the multifaceted domain of academic writing presents a series of pronounced challenges, particularly for non-native English-speaking students in technical institutions, a concern iteratively underscored in literature [5], [6]. It is asserted that these challenges are deeply rooted in factors such as teaching methodologies and individual linguistic competencies, necessitating a meticulous needs-based curriculum in postgraduate programs [7]. This intricate academic venture, central to higher education [1], requires not only a sophisticated grasp of various genres and purposes but also a critical consciousness towards the tacit norms governing this scholarly practice, enabling a more confident and innovative approach to academic writing development [8]. Consequently, it appears that amidst the rich yet fragmented scholarly discussions, there exists a conspicuous gap, characterized by the lack of cohesive synthesis and critical delineation of remedial strategies, suggesting an imperative for future academic inquiries to

foster communicative competence, thus facilitating a smoother academic progression and enhancing the caliber of scholarly endeavors in higher education landscapes.

The dynamic sphere of academic publishing, invariably linked to the writing process, entails many challenges exacerbated for EFL students, specifically within the confines of technical universities. This complex ecosystem, overseen by academic editors, has been experiencing a notable discrepancy in the publication rate between qualitative and quantitative research articles. However, the former significantly contributes to the knowledge base [9]. Students grapple strenuously with manifold hurdles on the pathway to publication, negotiating the intricacies of open access, financial constraints, and the stringent standards eminent journals uphold. The hegemonic discourse dictating academic writing, necessitating meticulous adherence to specific forms and styles [4]. Bridging the formidable gap between writing and publishing encapsulates a Herculean endeavor of manuscript preparation, engulfing a breadth of complexities from content articulation to stylistic intricacies. The precarious balance between academic writing and the publishing field calls for a comprehensive exploration to cultivate environments fostering scholarly proliferation and elevated academic expressions. Hence, a nuanced understanding of EFL postgraduate students' barriers in academic writing and their repercussions on publication experiences warrants a focused investigation, beckoning a rich avenue for future studies to enhance the existing scholarly corpus and craft targeted strategic interventions.

Thus, this research seeks to unfurl the myriad challenges encumbering EFL postgraduate students in their academic writing journey, delving into a critical analysis of the existing literature and delineating the contemporary state of the topic. The endeavor aims to synthesize the fragmented narratives, presenting a cohesive panorama of the impediments faced and providing a foundation for future research to foster proficiency and ease in academic writing and publishing. Through this lens, the study aspires to sculpt a trajectory where EFL postgraduate students can confidently navigate the intellectual landscape, equipped with the tools to carve a robust academic narrative in the global scholarly community.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of academic publication, the significance of disseminating scientific articles for Indonesian lecturers to advance their professional standing is underscored [10]. Meanwhile, a comprehensive analysis probes into the intricacies of syntactic complexity shifts within research article introductions, distinguishing between emerging and seasoned international publication authors [11]. Notably, research articles (RAs) occupy a pivotal space in the scholarly domain, tailored for specific research communities, and subjected to rigorous evaluation by editors and peer reviewers before earning publication rights [12]. Despite the publication pace disparity between qualitative and quantitative research articles, citation analysis hints at their comparable contributions to the field's knowledge base [9]. This analysis spotlights academic publishing as a multifaceted entity characterized by diverse interdisciplinary journals, each adhering to distinct review standards and selectivity criteria while observing a trend towards specialization in response to the evolving landscape of multifaceted academic fields. The role of academic editors and the dynamic terrain of open-access publishing are significant focal points in this scholarly publication panorama.

Open-access publishing has drawn attention within the confines of scholarly publications, mainly solving access issues but simultaneously bringing forth new cost challenges. A detailed exploration into how this trend is shaping the academic publication landscape, especially for EFL postgraduate students who are yet to mark their foothold in the academic world, remains a vital trajectory for future research.

Academic writing assumes a pivotal role within scholarly discourse, characterized by its formal, evidence-based approach and marked by precise diction, logical structure, and a neutral tone, facilitating the conveyance of intricate ideas and cultivating academic dialogues [4]. It is worth noting that for non-native English speakers, navigating the intricacies of this style is particularly challenging, influenced by their linguistic backgrounds and existing literacy levels. Consequently, achieving communicative competence in academic writing becomes a linchpin for academic success, underscoring its foundational significance within the educational landscape [5]. Postgraduate programs, recognizing the unique demands of academic writing, should develop tailored, needs-based curricula to empower students in this skill [7]. Notably, students within engineering sciences often grapple with heightened challenges in written expression, warranting focused attention [13].

Existing literature reveals that English serves as a scientific lingua franca in the global academic community, yet this necessitates a detailed understanding of how EFL postgraduate students navigate this lingua franca in the backdrop of their linguistic backgrounds. A critical examination of their strategies and approaches toward mastering the English language for academic purposes could offer deeper insights and facilitate enhanced pedagogical strategy for this demographic. Despite considerable research, a palpable gap persists in understanding the specific experiences and challenges EFL postgraduate students face at the nexus of academic writing and publishing. While the challenges emanating from linguistic backgrounds and teaching methodologies are identified, the depth of these challenges and the interconnected dynamics remain partially explored. Moreover, these students' individual narratives and experiences in navigating the intricate world of academic publication have found limited representation in existing research.

The research, therefore, carves out a niche in focusing on the specific challenges and experiences of EFL postgraduate students within the realms of academic writing and publication. The aim is to unravel the layers of complexities this group faces, transcending beyond the identified linguistic barriers to understanding the intricate dynamics at play. By delving deep into these students' narratives and strategies, the study seeks to foster a comprehensive understanding of their journey in the academic landscape, thereby aiming to facilitate a more nuanced pedagogical approach and support systems to guide them toward successful academic writing and publication. This exploration seeks to address the existing gaps and foster a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics EFL postgraduate students face in the global academic environment marked by evolving trends and established linguistic norms.

III.   METHOD

A. Research Setting and Design

The study was conducted across five prominent public universities in Central Java and Yogyakarta. These institutions offered postgraduate programs in linguistics and language education, encompassing majors in both English and Indonesian language. The participants, comprising ten postgraduate students, were purposively selected based on their prior research article publications in national or international journals. This diverse group comprised five master's degree students and five pursuing doctorate degrees in their second semester of study.

In addition, a qualitative research approach with a narrative research strategy was adopted for this study. The selection of narrative research as the primary strategy was motivated by the desire to delve into participants' lived experiences concerning their journey in writing research articles. Narrative inquiry, a well-established research strategy, facilitates a profound understanding of life-based stories [14]. This approach allows the stories to be assimilated into the data, subsequently utilizing narrative techniques for data analysis [15]. It emphasizes real-life events, prioritizing experiences over constructs or abstractions.

B. Data and Data Sources

Given the nature of narrative research, which revolves around recounting experiences, a combination of primary and secondary data was employed to ensure a comprehensive and objective dataset. Primary data encompassed information garnered from participants through open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions. Concurrently, secondary data were acquired from participants' academic supervisors using the same research instruments as employed with the participants.

C. Data Collection Technique

The research adopted a purposive sampling technique and employed diverse data collection methods. The primary data were acquired through an open-ended seven-question questionnaire distributed to respondents in early August 2023 and collected two weeks later. The questionnaire was meticulously designed within the framework of academic writing. Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted in September across various locations, including Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and Semarang, to validate the information derived from the data analysis collaboratively.

D. Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity of the data, the researchers implemented a triangulation approach encompassing methodological, theoretical, and researcher triangulation. The data were collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions and analyzed using established theories related to academic publications [16]–[18]. The involvement of both participants and their academic supervisors in reviewing the findings further bolstered the study's credibility. Through these rigorous triangulations, the study aimed to establish the trustworthiness of the analyzed data, ultimately providing a comprehensive narrative detailing the challenges faced in article writing and strategies to overcome them.

E. Data Analysis Technique

Following the narrative research strategy outlined by Creswell and Creswell [19], the study involved the meticulous analysis of participants' stories. These narratives were deconstructed, with critical elements identified and reconstructed into coherent and justifiable story frameworks. The process entailed systematically collecting stories, analyzing them, and constructing a chronological narrative.

IV.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered from students and lecturers portray a meticulous process that goes into academic writing strategies. The data reveals a structured, multi-step procedure where students are guided by their lecturers to ensure the production of high-quality articles that adhere to the standards of targeted journals. From the data, we can glean several major themes that dominate the strategies in academic writing:

A. Titles and Abstracts

The data reveals a thoughtful process behind creating titles and abstracts, which considers clarity, the conveyance of main research components, and appeal to potential readers. It shows an understanding of the crucial role a well-crafted title and abstract play in engaging readers. As an example, Student 1 and Supervisor 1 stated:

> I think the title of the article should be interesting. It must attract editors, reviewers, and readers at first sight. Initially, I made a monotonous title with a thesis or dissertation-style template. Then, I read a lot in reputable international journals that their titles closely represent the research findings. What is taken is the finding that is interesting and contains research novelty (Student 1).

> Provide supporting references on how to write effective and 'catchy' titles according to the research focus (Supervisor 1).

> Students emphasized the importance of a well-articulated title that encapsulates the essence of the research. The title formation process involves considering various elements, including methodology, main variables, and research outcomes, to convey the research focus clearly and succinctly.

> In addition, students revealed a systematic approach to crafting abstracts, ensuring it encompasses essential components such as objectives, methods, main findings, and conclusions. Inspiration is drawn from reputable articles to shape the abstract aptly. Moreover, Student 2 and Supervisor 2 asserted:

> For the abstract, I made a framework like this: research context, novelty, research objectives, methods, findings, implications, and suggestions for future research. However, I am still learning to pay attention to the abstracts of journal articles with an outstanding reputation updated with the format (Student 2).

> Explain to students the structure of research articles that include IMRaD and the components that must be present in each part. Ask students to refer to a template that suits the intended journal (Supervisor 2).

The strategy involves considering many factors, including clear expression of research focus, methodology, and main variables, to ensure a compelling and descriptive title and abstract. Here, inspiration is often drawn from reputable international journals. Lecturers guide students in paying close attention to each component, offering reviews and consultations to refine these crucial elements.

B. Introduction

Developing the introduction involves a deep dive into existing literature and carefully articulating the research urgency. The introductory section is built on a foundation of meticulous research involving exploring themes, understanding the urgency of the research, and augmenting the section with rich references, showcasing a depth of pre-existing knowledge and a gap that the research intends to fill. Students employ strategies such as enriching references and articulating theoretical gaps to build a compelling introduction. Lecturers facilitate this through careful review and guidance, ensuring a well-rounded introduction. Student 2 and Supervisor 2 mentioned:

> … elaborate on the urgency of the research. Then I reviewed the research previous findings … . shortcomings …. my research presence would be capable of bridge, complement, or add another point of view to the study (Student 2).

> Explain the steps for writing an introduction … Determine the research objective and write it at the end of the introduction. Determine the research gap. Write a background that is relevant to the topic and research title. Go from the general to the specific. Synthesize the latest research related to the research topic. Pay attention to the correct use of conjunctions such as "however," although, "Few studies," Further investigation," etc., to emphasize the novelty of the research (Supervisor 2).

C. Methodology

To ensure the methodological rigor of the articles, students are encouraged to delve deep into research methods, referring to similar studies to establish the suitability of their research design. Lecturers play a pivotal role here, providing tailored guidance in selecting appropriate methodological resources and encouraging the creation of research maps to visualize the right research variables and methodologies. For example, Student 3 and Supervisor 3 noted:

> I choose one article to use as a writing guide, then understand the method. ... .Look for examples of its application related to data collection and analysis. (Student 3)

> Understand research objectives and how to achieve these objectives. Study research types/designs and paradigms. Determine the appropriate type/design of research related to the research

objectives that have been determined. Check data collection methods/techniques in the selected research type/design and instruments. Check data analysis methods/techniques in the research type chosen/design and instruments (Supervisor 3).

D. Result and Discussion

A crucial theme emerging from the data is the emphasis on clarity and accuracy in presenting research findings. Students encounter challenges presenting data in the required formats, grappling with data complexity and limitations, adherence to journal rules, and handling biased data. This theme highlights the areas where students might require more guidance and support. As an example, Students 3-4 stated:

I prefer to use tables for data organization to make it neat and easy to read. Then, use straightforward language, but not too long, to help explain the flow of the presentation. Refer directly to the table presented in the explanatory sentence (Student 3)

> ... I made sure to present my research results using subthemes or subtopics. So, after completing data collection, I will usually code and categorize the data into several subthemes that correspond to the research question in the study. To present it more clearly and accurately, I usually also show examples of the data directly, such as student interview quotes, percentage tables, and photos of artifacts that show the data .... (Student 4)

> Students leverage mentor articles for inspiration, adopting analytical tools and techniques to create comprehensive presentations of their findings. Students adhere to a structured process, which includes creating outlines and seeking peer reviews to ensure clarity and accuracy in the presentation. This process encompasses a multi-dimensional approach involving tabular presentations and analytic methods.

> Students are conscious of presenting their research findings clearly and accurately, a task supported by lecturers. Lecturers guide students in navigating complex data and encourage the utilization of visual aids for clearer representation. Various analytic tables, graphs, and discussions point towards a structured methodology adopted for effectively presenting results. Moreover, Supervisor 4 asserted:

> The steps I suggest: Start by restating the problem underlying the research and the theory used to analyze the data; Report findings based on the research methods used; Present the findings in order of research objectives; Do not present data that is not relevant to answering the research question; Present data in a form that is easy or quick to understand, such as tables, graphs, or photos (Supervisor 4).

Students deeply analyze their findings, grounding their interpretations in expert opinions and existing literature and adopting a comparative approach to validate their results. The students thoroughly explain and interpret the research findings, draw comparisons with existing research, and leverage expert opinions to build a convincing narrative around the findings. Lecturers facilitate this by helping students navigate the intricacies of data interpretation and encouraging a draft-first approach to ensure comprehensive coverage of research questions.

E. Leveraging Technology for Writing

Both students and lecturers employ various modern tools such as Mendeley, Zotero, and AI assistance like ChatGPT to enhance the quality and efficiency of the research and writing process. This theme underscores the pivotal role technology plays in modern academic writing. Technology is not only a facilitator in the research process but also a critical tool that aids in developing and fine-tuning the manuscript, assisting both in citation management and ensuring the quality of writing through AI tools like ChatGPT. For instance, Student 5 said:

Apart from that, we also sometimes use the help of AI ChatGPT to look at issues/ brainstorming (Student 5)

Both students and lecturers focus on the necessity to reference the latest research and findings. Students utilize tools such as Mendeley and Zotero to curate up-to-date bibliographies, ensuring the relevance and contemporariness of their citations, a practice reinforced by lecturer guidance. In addition, Student 3 and Supervisor 6 asserted:

> I use features in MS Word that connect directly to Mendeley or other citation software (Student 3).

> Practice independently for mastering reference software manager (RSM) according to their interests (Mendeley, Zotero, or EndNote) and use it to aggregate literature (from top tier journals and published in the last ten years) (Supervisor 6)

In addition, students leverage various technological tools such as Grammarly and Quillbot to improve their manuscript's grammar and overall quality. The use of technology extended to employing applications like "Publish or Perish" to aid in identifying pertinent research areas and establish their work's novelty. For example, Student 6 and Supervisors 5-6 made this comment:

... I check my grammar and writing using Grammarly AI. After that, I used a proofreading service that involved native speakers (Student 6).

Suggest using technology-based tools such as Quillbot (paraphrasing app) and Grammarly (Supervisor 5).

Introducing the publish and perish or scopus.com platform to filter relevant and up-to-date articles (Supervisor 6).

F. Discussion

The current research sheds substantial light on the strategies EFL postgraduate students encounter during the intricate academic writing process. The data unearthed a multifaceted yet structured approach overseen by lecturers, focusing on the detailed crafting of titles, abstracts, and introductions based on comprehensive research and methodological rigor [20]. Furthermore, it delineates the careful construction of results and discussions, utilizing various analytical tools and methods [21]. It also unveils the modernized aspect of the process, where technology has a pivotal role in enhancing efficiency and quality.

Comparing these insights with existing literature portrays a considerable agreement with prior studies emphasizing a systematic approach to academic writing. Nevertheless, this research adds a rich layer of understanding by revealing specific strategies such as utilizing the "Publish or Perish" tool and meticulous crafting of various manuscript sections, painting a vivid picture of contemporary practices fostered through technological advancement [22]. These findings resonate well with the existing paradigm but offer a more detailed blueprint of the intricate processes undertaken by EFL postgraduate students, thus extending the pre-existing knowledge base.

One could argue that drawing inspiration from reputable articles could stunt originality in the realm of title and abstract creation. However, the study reveals that this strategy is predominantly utilized to shape the rhetorical structure rather than imitating content, thereby sustaining the originality of the research. Furthermore, lecturers should guide students to pay meticulous attention to each constituent of the title and abstract, ensuring a well-rounded presentation of the research focus, thus mitigating the risk of undue influence from existing works [23].

One might postulate that a deep reliance on lecturers for guidance during the introduction and methodology stages could overshadow the student's independent analytical abilities. Yet, it is apparent that this mentorship fosters a rich research culture, encouraging students to identify theoretical gaps and select appropriate methodological resources, ultimately nurturing independent critical thinking skills grounded in expert guidance [24]. This approach demonstrates a symbiotic relationship promoting depth and autonomy in academic writing.

As students steer towards the stages of results and discussion, the potential for distorted representation due to complex data management might emerge as a criticism. Nevertheless, the counter-argument holds strength here, with students being encouraged to adopt a multi-dimensional approach involving diverse analytical methods to present results effectively [25]. Moreover, a comparative approach endorsed by lecturers augments the validity of their findings, further negating potential counterclaims of biased representation.

Practically, this study highlights an urgent need for educational institutions to emphasize mentorship in academic writing, underlining the crucial role of lecturers in guiding students through various stages of manuscript preparation. The insights offer a robust endorsement for integrating technology in academic writing, urging institutions to acquaint students with modern tools to aid research and writing, thus heightening efficiency and quality.

While providing substantial insights, this study is not exempt from potential limitations. The findings primarily revolve around the students' and lecturers' perspectives, leaving a scope for further exploration of how these strategies fare in real-world scenarios, such as journal acceptance rates. Moreover, the potential influence of individual lecturers' expertise and the role of existing institutional frameworks in guiding these strategies remain somewhat unexplored, posing a fertile ground for future research.

V.   CONCLUSION

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that EFL postgraduate students and their supervisors employ a diverse and nuanced set of strategies in academic writing. The insights garnered from this study elucidate a structured and technology-integrated approach, advocating for a crucial role of mentorship in fostering academic rigor and maintaining the authenticity and originality of the research undertakings. The study further strengthens the idea that guided mentorship promotes a harmonious balance between guidance and autonomous critical thinking, encouraging students to identify theoretical gaps and opt for apt methodological resources.

The current study brings to light the careful crafting of titles, abstracts, and introductory sections under expert guidance. While drawing from existing reputable articles, this methodical approach is chiefly employed to shape the rhetorical structure, a strategy that preserves the originality of students' research endeavors. These findings agree

with previous research and enrich the existing literature by offering a detailed blueprint of the intricate processes and modernized strategies EFL postgraduate students and supervisors actively engage in.

Additionally, the research underlines technology's significant role in enhancing the efficiency and quality of academic writing. It suggests that educational institutions must prioritize integrating modern tools into the curriculum, fostering a learning environment where students can adeptly navigate both research and writing processes. These results provide a sturdy foundation for a reinvigorated academic writing process where technology and mentorship go hand in hand, presenting a promising avenue for educational institutions aiming for qualitative upliftment in research dynamics.

However, while this study does delineate the pivotal role of lecturers in guiding EFL postgraduate students, it also acknowledges the existing gaps and the urgent need for further research to understand the real-world implications of these strategies. The current data highlight the importance of exploring varied facets, including the acceptance rates in journals and a deeper inquiry into the individual expertise of lecturers and institutional frameworks, thereby suggesting a fertile ground for future studies to build upon. Through a deeper understanding of these dimensions, one can envisage a more rounded and enriched academic writing landscape for EFL postgraduate students.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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