



The Difficulties of EFL Graduate Students in Writing a Scientific Article

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on the previous conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, many students face serious problems with English as a foreign language skills in online learning. EFL students find it challenging to comprehend and communicate, even in spoken or written form. Research on students' difficulties in writing scientific articles in English as a foreign language is scarce. Most researchers focus on students' problems in writing generally. The current research aimed to identify and write about the writing difficulties faced by graduate students in scientific articles who are studying in the English Education Graduate Program. The researcher applied descriptive quantitative research as the research method. The sample of this research is graduate students who wanted to complete scientific articles as one of the requirements for passing the master's degree. The instruments used were closed-ended questionnaires. There are ten areas of difficulty in writing a scientific article. Based on the research findings, the researcher found that some students still face various difficulties in writing scientific articles in each category of common issues, which consists of 10 classifications of difficulties. The study concluded that the most prevalent high difficulties faced by students in writing a scientific article were using grammar (72%), structuring an argument (70%), textual organization (68,5%), relating the text to the audience and reader (64%), making knowledge claims (64,5%), revealing and concealing the author's view (65%), use of "hedges" to indicate caution (67%). The last category at a high level is "interference" of different cultural views (68%).

Keywords: Covid-19, EFL, scientific article, writing difficulties

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has been spreading throughout the world up to the beginning of the year 2022. This condition has led to unprecedented changes in the educational environment. Most of the time, the academic impact is on students' learning. The interrelated circumstances of negative impact on students' learning, including their language skills, for instance, writing, speaking, reading, and listening skills. Teachers cannot separate them from this phenomenon until now. The needs to be a significant concern to overcome the harshest problems in the long run. One of the essential aspects of English is the emphasis on four primary skills. One of the crucial skills to be focused on in this research is writing skills.

Writing is a way of transferring and expressing ideas, information, opinions, thoughts, or messages in the form of writing. In line with [1], writing is one of the most difficult activities and complicated skills to be learned because it requires critical thinking and complex

to generate ideas, words, sentences, paragraphs, and compositions. These activities help students communicate their ideas and express sense more effectively. The statement above is supported by [2], a writer should master choosing correct words and must follow the appropriate grammatical structure. Writing is about more than just the finished written product; it is also about the process that allows writers to develop their ideas. The writing process stimulates students to focus on accurate language use. They can solve problems which happen in their minds during writing [3].

Meanwhile, many students confess that writing is a difficult skill to learn for EFL students because it requires mastery of a variety of linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural aspects [4]. In line with [5], the most difficult task to do in language learning is to produce coherent, fluent, and expanded writing, which is very difficult for foreign language learners and even second language learners. As a result, in order to accomplish

the academic standard of writing, students must write coherently in English, with which they may be less proficient or even unfamiliar [6], [7]. Most EFL students feel disappointed when they do not have ideas and good grammar to express their writing in the form of papers. As a result, to master writing, students need to learn and practice writing frequently.

As graduate students, students are required to be able to conduct research for final assignments or as one of the requirements for finishing their study, which is poured into the form of scientific articles. Similarly, at several universities in Indonesia, the majority require students who have completed their graduate education to publish the results of their research in the form of a paper known as a scientific article.

Therefore, students must understand academic papers such as research papers, scientific articles, books, essays, and scholarly publications. Of course, this is based on student understanding when studying academic writing courses. According to [8], scientific articles can be called the space to explore a lot of ideas, opinions, and knowledge in academic words which becomes a reason for the scientific community to find that academic journals began their important role in the eighteenth century.

Moreover, academic papers are becoming important for those in language education to write scientific articles to secure or keep an academic position. In reality, many of the students have not had a good experience in writing scientific articles. Based on a preliminary study, the researcher discussed and observed with several students in the graduate program. The students faced several difficulties; poor organization of ideas into meaningful and readable pieces, finding an interesting topic, grammatical accuracy, use of citations, and making the writing coherent.

Therefore, there are many causes of the phenomena stated above. The students face several difficulties in writing a scientific article in English. According to several researchers based on their research on writing scientific articles, several factors that cause students' challenges and difficulties in writing are derived from students' internal factors [9]. Furthermore, recent studies have looked at the students' perception of writing problems [10], students' problems in writing [11]–[17], writing difficulties [18]–[24], the challenges in writing a academic paper, scientific paper, etc [8], [25]–[27], and barriers to writing research papers and getting them published, as perceived by Turkish physicians [1].

Several researchers have participated of the investigation of the difficulties to writing generally. It can be concluded that few studies of investigations focused merely on writing scientific articles for graduate students' degrees. This research is not as extensive as the previous research, especially on subject research and the specification of the research, which is investigated in this research.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Related to the description above, it is clear that most students still face problems in writing. The students were found to have difficulty when they are writing in English, especially in writing scientific articles for academic purposes. They also have difficulty finding ideas and topics to be assigned as the latest research to be researched, and they are not good at using proper grammar.

Based on the explanation above, a research question could be investigated in this research. The problem is formulated in the following form of a research question: What are the difficulties faced by students in writing a scientific article in English Education Graduate Program?

1.2. Purpose of the Research

The main objective of this research is to investigate the difficulties of graduate students in writing a scientific article. The study was conducted to fulfil the following specific purpose: To find out the difficulties faced by students in writing a scientific article in English Education Graduate Program.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Writing Skill

Writing is a kind of English skill that serves to express ideas in written form. Although it is well known that it is a productive skill, many EFL students are concerned and worried when writing from their native language to English. Writing is a complex process involving many considerations from various factors, such as motivational, cognitive, cultural, and social factors. Its development depends on applying strategies and techniques in writing when facing problems and challenges, especially for EFL students. The identification of the problems that students face in their writing, as well as the use of pedagogical interventions that increase their metacognitive awareness about writing, is an essential component in assisting students in developing their writing skills.

2.1.1 Definition of Writing

Writing is being able to express thoughts, feelings and ideas through notes that aim to be easily understood by others. According to Dumais (1988), cited in [2], the ability to write in English is intended to fill the gap that exists between a person's ability to express ideas, feelings, opinions, etc. in Indonesia and the ability to communicate the same thing in written form in English. This means that, with the written form, a person can express ideas, theories, and feelings more precisely. In contrast to the writing in academic articles that is scientific and academic, the thoughts and ideas that are poured into paper must be based on and based on theory. Moreover, in writing, we must choose excellent

and correct words and phrases and must follow the proper structure.

Writing has always been a means of moving away from the narrow confines of pressing tasks to ask the unanswered questions that underpin our work. Good writing transforms paralysis into curiosity, the mundane into the whimsical; it is also the stage at which we return to our disciplined training roots and participate in larger conversations that emerge from small spaces.

2.1.2 The Components of Writing

According to Brown, there are six components of writing skills should be considered [28]. He classified the components as follows: content, organization, discourse, syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics. However, based on several considerations the researcher found the components of writing skills from Jacobs et al. (1981), cited in [29]. Regarding writing skills, five components should be assessed in writing a scientific article, as follows: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Some criteria must be met by the components. In the following discussion, the researcher will discuss the criteria in great detail.

a. Content

In the writing activity, authors should have distinct main ideas. Furthermore, the paragraph must be convincing. It means that there should be enough logical points to support the points that were left out, with no irrelevant points included. The writing's focus must be consistent, and the content of the writing should be clear in order to make the reader easier in understanding the message conveyed by the author.

b. Organization

What is meant by the organization is that the author reflects on how he chronologically arranges ideas that are interrelated and structured when compiling the text. The thing that is very necessary when writing is to present ideas chronologically, from the beginning to the end of the idea in a row. There are several forms of writing that must be structured and coordinated, such as writing essays, academic papers, scientific articles, theses, etc. All ideas are connected to each other in a coherent text.

Moreover, in writing academic paper, the authors should consider the effectiveness of introductions, the logical sequence of ideas, concluding sentences, and the length of the compositions.

c. Vocabulary

Word choice is essential for writing high-quality compositions. Depending on the type of writing task, authors should use the appropriate vocabulary. Vocabulary is one aspect of language that is related to the process of language learning in writing skills. When selecting vocabulary, authors can consult dictionaries and thesauruses. Subsequently, the text can produce understandable writing with this. Thus, the ability to master a

variety of word choices can assist in the development of more varied writing with a non-monotonous writing style.

d. Language Use

The use of written language has implications for the correct form of language determination or grammar. It focuses on verbs, nouns, and conventions. More specialized nouns and stronger verbs give the reader a clearer picture of a specific description of something. There are many opportunities for errors in the use of verbs and for very common misunderstandings. For this matter, it is strongly emphasized that the author is encouraged to re-read and review what they have written to reduce errors in writing.

e. Mechanics

The mechanics of writing include the use of proper capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. This aspect is very crucial in directing the reader to understand or recognize what the author wants to convey and mean with certainty, so that there is no misunderstanding from the reader. According to [29], using a good mechanism in writing will make it easier for readers to understand ideas for delivering ideas, messages, or information in writing.

2.2. Writing Difficulties

Although writing is well known that it is a productive skill, many EFL students are concerned and worried when they are writing from their native language to English. "Difficulty" refers to things or situations that cause problems and need effort or skill to face that situation [30]. Therefore, writing difficulties can refer to any problematic situation that arises during the writing process, making movement more difficult and making the writing process not easy.

Writing activities result in any form of writing, for instance, essays, scientific articles, research papers, theses, and anything else related to the text. When doing writing activities, students frequently encounter problems and difficulties completing their tasks. Based on his research findings, [15] discovered that many students have various writing problems, including language problems at the morphology and syntax levels; usage errors, mechanical mistakes such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, and a lack of several writing development skills, cognitive problems, and graphomotor problems.

When it comes to writing assignments for any academic purpose, the majority of students in any university have some difficulties. As a result, lecturers have to provide students with the kinds of writing skills emphasized in the current issue of the publication. When writing for educational purposes, they frequently make mistakes in the concept of ideas, coherence and cohesion, warnings, conjunctions, prepositions, and so on [13].

Furthermore, students face several difficulties when writing scientific articles or academic papers, such as

plagiarism, grammatical errors, lexical difficulties, and a lack of planning [13]. In addition, based on the research finding [8], it was found that difficulty in writing on how to claim knowledge faced by the students is the most common difficulty.

3. METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

In this research, the researcher used descriptive quantitative research as a design to gain the data. This research is designed to investigate the graduate students' difficulties faced by the students in writing a scientific article. This research collected data from two classes in the English Education Graduate Program in the fourth-year due to students at that level encountering many difficulties while finishing their writing a scientific article for academic purposes.

The participants in this research took a sample of the research that consisted of 25 students. The researcher took the students in master's program or graduate students at the English Education Graduate Program of Universitas Negeri Padang, and the sample of this research is graduate students in the last year of study.

In this program, participants must be able to write scientific articles because it is one of the mandatory assignments in several courses for the first until third semester. Before taking the samples, the researcher chose them based on some considerations. For instance, among them are those who have the educational background, achievement, and more experience in academic writing classes from the undergraduate program until the graduate program. In this case, scientific articles are usually used as a requirement for passing the final assignment as a core of an academic writing class. Moreover, scientific article is primarily used as a requirement for passing the master's degrees program at Universitas Negeri Padang.

The researcher used a questionnaire to investigate the difficulties of graduate students in the master's degree program. The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting information, often numerical data, providing structure, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and being comparatively simple to analyze. Closed-questionnaire was designed to find out the students' difficulties in writing a scientific article. Using a questionnaire allows participants to choose an answer from a list of indicators, making it simple to analyze the score.

Furthermore, the closed-questionnaire consists of 10 indicators of difficulties, and each of the indicators contains two items. Thus, in the questionnaire, there are 20 items of statements, and then they are rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree (SD)", "Disagree (D)", "Agree (A)", and "Strongly Agree (SA)". The questionnaires were delivered by using Google Forms. The questionnaire is placed on a website designed by the researcher, and respondents can then answer the questions and submit the questionnaire through online access. It was eventually thought to be an effective and efficient method for both researchers

and participants. After gathering the data, it was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and the SPSS statistics application version 20.

In addition, to obtain the percentage, the researcher employs the following formula to calculate scores into percentage. The formula of percentage as follows:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Frequency of Statement}}{\text{Total Item}} \times 100\%$$

Where:

P = percentage

F = frequency of statement

n = total items

Table 1. The Level of Percentage

Criteria	Frequency	Level of Score
Very High	Strongly Agree	75 – 100
High	Agree	51 – 75
Low	Disagree	26 – 50
Very Low	Strongly Disagree	0 – 25

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The researcher used the questionnaire to investigate the difficulties in writing scientific article sfaced by the students on the current issue. A closed-questionnaire was used in this investigation.

Students' Difficulties in Writing Scientific Article

The distribution of the 25 respondents' responses to each questionnaire item is shown below:

Table 2. Frequency and Mean score

No	Indicators	Frequency				Mean Score
		SD	D	A	SA	
1.	Grammar	2	3	17	3	5,76
		1	4	16	4	
2.	Use citations	2	11	9	3	4,80
		3	13	8	1	
3.	Making references	3	15	6	1	4,32
		3	16	6	-	
4.	Structuring of argument	1	7	13	4	5,60
		1	7	13	4	
5.	Textual organization	1	8	13	3	5,48
		1	7	14	3	
6.	Relating text to audience	1	7	16	1	5,12
		2	11	11	1	
7.	Knowledge claims	1	9	14	1	5,16
		1	9	15	-	
8.	Reveal or conceal the author's view	1	10	13	1	5,20
		1	8	15	11	
9.	Use of "hedges" to indicate caution	1	5	17	2	5,36
		1	10	13	1	
10.	"interference" different with cultural views	1	11	10	3	5,44
		1	5	16	3	

Based on research findings, there were 10 indicators as the main classification to investigate the difficulties faced by the students while writing scientific

articles. It can be seen from the method of the research that there was 20 items number of the statement, and each indicator had two items.

From table 2 above, it can be seen the response of the participant can answer the research question of this investigation. It was revealed from indicator 1 about grammar (item numbers 1-2) that 17-16 participants agreed that it is still difficult to use good English grammar when they are writing a scientific article (5,76); this is categorized as a high level of difficulty in grammar. Then, from indicator number 2 about the use of citation (item numbers 3-4), there are 11, and 13 participants who disagree that they can not use proper citation during writing (4,80). In addition, the indicator number 3 about making references (item numbers 5-6), there are 15 and 16 participants who disagree that they find difficulty in making references during writing an article (4,32). The indicator number 4 (item numbers 7-8) above, it can be seen that there are 13 and 13 participants who agree that they find difficulty in structuring the arguments into written form (5,60). The next indicator is number 5 (item numbers 9-10), there are 13 and 14 participants who agree that they feel difficult to write the article clearly and orderly in a good textual organization (5,48).

Furthermore, the table above reveals that in indicator number 6 (item numbers 11-12), it can be seen that there are 16 and 11 participants who agree that they have difficulty conveying their idea can be understandable to the reader (5,12). Then, indicator number 7 (item numbers 13-14) reveals that there are 14 and 15 participants who agree that they were difficult in making knowledge claims in their writing (5,16). Indicator number 8 (item numbers 15-16) indicates that there are 13 and 15 participants who agree about the difficulty and problem in revealing and concealing the point of view of the writer (5,20). The next indicator is number 9 (item numbers 17-18) indicates that 17 and 13 participants agree that they have difficulty in using "hedges" to indicate the caution expected by the academic community from their writing (5,36). The last indicator, number 10 (item numbers 19-20), reveals that 10 and 16 participants agree that they find difficulty with the different cultural views regarding the nature of academic processes (5,44).

Table 3. Mean score, Max, Min, SD, Percentage

No	Indicator	Mean	Max	Min	SD	%
1	Grammar	5,76	8	2	1,363	72
2	Use citations	4,80	8	2	1,354	60
3	Making references	4,32	7	2	1,145	54
4	Structuring of argument	5,60	8	2	1,443	70
5	Textual organization	5,48	8	2	1,358	68,5
6	Relating text to audience	5,12	8	2	1,236	64
7	Knowledge claims	5,16	7	2	1,143	64,5
8	Reveal or conceal the	5,20	7	2	1,225	65

	author's view					
9	Use of "hedges" to indicate caution	5,36	7	2	1,114	67
10	"interference" with different cultural views	5,44	8	2	1,387	68

Based on table 3 above, it was found that most of the participants had difficulties in writing scientific articles. The result of the findings shows that they have a "High" category of difficulty, they are: First, using good English grammar, which has a percentage of 72% categorized as high level in regards to agreeing to statements towards several difficulties explained in the questionnaire. Second, the finding shows students have difficulty in the structuring of argumentation, for which the percentage is 70%. Students have difficulty in textual organization, which the percentage 68,5%. Students have difficulty relating the text to the audience and reader, with a percentage of 64%. Students have difficulty in making knowledge claims, which percentage 64,5%. Students have difficulty revealing and concealing the author's view, which percentage of 65%. Students have difficulty with the use of "hedges with", a percentage of 67%. The last category high-level students' difficulty paying attention to the different cultural views, has a percentage of 68%. Meanwhile, two indicators were categorized in the "Low" category of difficulty. First, students have difficulty in the use of citations which has a percentage of 60%. Then, students have difficulty in making references, which has a percentage of 54%.

It can be concluded that the percentage from several indicators of writing difficulties shows that most participants "agree" that they had difficulties with eight indicators of difficulties mentioned in Tables 2 and 3 above. The research findings indicated a high level which means agree with the difficulties in writing a scientific article.

5. CONCLUSION

Writing scientific articles is a current phenomenon nowadays. With the development and sophistication of the times, the world of research has become very popular, especially among academics in the world of education. Most colleges and universities require students to write scientific articles. Then, it is undeniable that postgraduate students are able to write articles based on scientific research, which are then published in journals indexed nationally and internationally.

Writing articles is an essential part of the article creation process. However, most graduate students still have many difficulties in writing scientific papers. Based on the research findings, 17 students agree, 1 student strongly agree, and 7 students disagree on the ten areas of difficulties in writing scientific article (use grammar, use citations, making references, compiling ideas, textual organization, relating the text to the

audience, ways in which to make knowledge claims, ways to reveal the author's view, hedges to indicate caution by the academic community, and "interference" with different cultural). Additionally, research findings show several students have a low level of difficulty in making citations and references due to their disagreement on both difficulties area.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer would like to give a special thanks of my gratitude to my advisor, Muhd. Al Hafizh for the guidance, comments on earlier versions of this article, and support to finish this article. Then, special thanks to my parents, my family, and all of my friends who helped me in writing this article.

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