



Exploring the Challenges Faced by ESP Students in Writing Academic Essay

Dwita Laksmi Rachmawati ^{*1}, Dian Fadhilawati ²

^{1*} Universitas Merdeka Pasuruan, Indonesia.

² Universitas Islam Balitar, Indonesia.

ARTICEL INFO

Keywords:

ESP
Students
Academic Writing
Essay

History:

Received (8 June 2024)
Revised (30 July 2024)
Accepted (6 August 2024)

ABSTRACT

Academic writing plays a fundamental role in both school and university settings, serving as a primary means of communication and assessment across disciplines. This research employed a qualitative approach to investigate the challenges encountered by ESP students, particularly economics students in composing English academic essays. This research was conducted in East Java, Indonesia. The qualitative component involved the documentation, semi-structured interview, and analysis of students' English essays to ascertain these obstacles and semi structured interview. There are 10 second-semester students selected as participants of this study enrolled in the Management Study Program from one private university in East Java, Indonesia during the academic year 2023/2024. The analysis of students' essay writing problems reveals several key areas of concern. These include issues with organization (writing format), task completion, originality, content and discourse, and writing mechanics. ESP students often face challenges in academic essay writing due to gaps in specialized vocabulary, grammar, and unfamiliarity with academic conventions, exacerbated by limited practice and insufficient feedback. To address these issues, educator should provide targeted language support, integrate writing-intensive courses, offer detailed feedback, and establish accessible writing resources.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing plays a fundamental role in both school and university settings, serving as a primary means of communication and assessment across disciplines (Wulyani et al., 2019). Whether students are crafting essays, research papers, lab reports, or dissertations, academic writing is essential for expressing ideas, engaging with course material, and demonstrating mastery of subject matter. In both school and university environments, academic writing serves several key purposes and is characterized by specific conventions and expectations (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). At the school level, academic writing serves as a crucial tool for developing students' critical thinking, analytical skills, and literacy abilities. Academic writing takes on greater complexity and depth at the university level, reflecting the advanced intellectual demands of higher education. University students are expected to engage critically with scholarly literature, contribute original insights to their field of study, and adhere to rigorous standards of academic integrity. Throughout both school and university, academic writing serves not only as a means of assessment but also as a vehicle for intellectual

growth, communication, and scholarly inquiry. Developing proficiency in academic writing is essential for students' academic success and their ability to engage meaningfully with their chosen fields of study (Farahsani et al., 2023). Therefore, students must achieve and enhance their academic writing skills.

Academic writing complexity often contributes to plagiarism among students, particularly when coupled with factors such as a lack of writing habit and insufficient cognitive processes (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). Students who do not have a regular writing habit may find it difficult to approach academic writing assignments systematically. Without consistent practice, they may feel overwhelmed by the task and resort to shortcuts, such as copying from sources without proper attribution. Developing a writing habit requires discipline, time management skills, and dedication. Students who are not accustomed to writing regularly may struggle to allocate sufficient time and effort to their assignments, increasing the likelihood of plagiarism. Academic writing requires students to engage in various cognitive processes, including comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Silvia, 2024). Students who lack these cognitive skills may struggle to understand complex concepts, formulate coherent arguments, and express their ideas effectively in writing. Without adequate cognitive processes, students may resort to plagiarism as a shortcut to completing their assignments, rather than engaging deeply with the material and developing their own ideas. Additionally, since students have to write academic writing in English, students may struggle to articulate their ideas effectively or convey complex concepts accurately due to limitations in their English language skills.

The art of crafting academic essays stands as a crucial competency for students in various fields, acting as a principal avenue for communication and evaluation within the realm of tertiary education (Meiranti, 2013). Nonetheless, for individuals enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs, who are endeavouring to refine their academic writing skills within their respective academic domains as non-native English speakers, the task of producing proficient essays poses a considerable obstacle. The task of writing academic essays in English remains a formidable hurdle for many ESP learners. Academic writing represents a cornerstone of higher education, serving as a primary means of scholarly communication and intellectual engagement. From research papers to critical analyses, academic essays demand a sophisticated command of language, critical thinking skills, and an understanding of disciplinary conventions (Febriani, 2023). However, for ESP students, who often grapple with the added complexity of writing in a second language, mastering the nuances of academic writing poses significant challenges. This research article explores the intricate difficulties encountered by ESP students in essay composition, with the intention of uncovering the underlying determinants and suggesting instructional approaches to mitigate these hurdles.

ESP English material can include content about writing essays. The competence of writing academic essay can be beneficial for ESP students. While ESP courses are tailored to meet specific language needs in various professional and academic contexts, essay writing can be an essential skill in many of these areas (Lebedev et al., 2020). For instance, in the context of Academic English or EAP (English for Academic

Purposes), students need to write essays, research papers, and other academic assignments. Then, in Business English context, professionals may need to write business reports, proposals, and analyses. In the field of Legal English, legal professionals often write memos, briefs, and opinions that resemble structured essays. For technical English, Engineers and scientists might write technical reports or research essays. Finally, in the Journalism and Media English, journalists write articles, opinion pieces, and editorials. Essay writing in ESP courses helps learners develop essential skills such as critical thinking, argumentation, and clear communication, which are valuable across various professional and academic contexts. The material can be tailored to the specific needs and goals of the learners, ensuring that the essay writing practice is relevant and practical.

The challenges faced by ESP students in writing academic essays are multifaceted and multifarious, encompassing linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary dimensions. At the linguistic level, Silvia (2024) stated that students encounter difficulties with grammar, syntax, vocabulary usage, and sentence structure, hindering their ability to convey their ideas clearly and coherently. Moreover, the nuances of academic language and register add an additional layer of complexity, requiring ESP learners to navigate the intricate terrain of formal academic discourse. Moreover, the study of Farahsani et al. (2023) reveals several outcomes, including issues such as critical thinking, punctuation, word selection, grammatical errors, and essay structure, which emerge as challenges for students in their acquisition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Febriani (2023) ESP students, particularly non-native English speakers, may struggle with grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and idiomatic expressions, impacting their ability to express themselves clearly and fluently in written English. Even postgraduate-level students encounter such challenges. According to Rohmatillah (2014), grammatical accuracy stands out as a common hurdle for non-native speaker graduate students. Similarly, Ariyanti & Fitriana (2017) also identified grammatical issues as a prevalent concern. Graduate students, as noted by Alsamadani (2017), particularly struggle with English academic writing due to deficiencies in language skills and a lack of motivation towards writing, resulting in stagnant progress in their writing abilities. Additionally, Mohammed (2021) highlighted students' inability to distinguish between spoken and written language, failure to create outlines before drafting, and difficulty in identifying the requisite skills for effective writing. Consequently, it can be deduced that students worldwide, both at the school and university levels, whether undergraduate or graduate, encounter challenges in English academic writing.

Beyond linguistic barriers, ESP students must also contend with challenges related to genre awareness and disciplinary conventions (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Rachmawati et al., 2021; Isma et al., 2023). Academic writing encompasses a diverse array of genres, each with its own set of rhetorical strategies, organizational patterns, and linguistic features. However, many ESP students lack familiarity with these genres, making it challenging for them to adapt their writing style to suit different types of academic essays. Furthermore,

disciplinary differences in writing conventions further compound the challenge, necessitating students' acclimation to the unique norms and expectations of their respective fields.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping ESP students' experiences with academic writing (Silvia, 2024). Cultural differences in rhetorical patterns, argumentation styles, and approaches to evidence presentation can influence students' writing practices and perceptions of academic discourse. Additionally, the cultural context in which academic writing is situated may impact students' attitudes towards authority, citation practices, and academic integrity, further complicating their writing process.

Many students struggle because they do not familiarize themselves with the scoring rubric (Rachmawati, 2021). A scoring rubric serves as a tool for instructors to assess their students' performance, offering several benefits such as facilitating learning, skill development, and fostering critical thinking (Rachmawati & Hastari, 2022). Employing a writing rubric can assist students in preparing their writing tasks to achieve high scores in their writing courses. Various forms of assessment are utilized in academic writing, typically focusing on content, organization, grammar, and mechanics (Meiranti, 2013), depending on the specific aspects that instructors wish to evaluate. Brown (2001) proposed six aspects for assessing students' writing; content, organization, discourse, syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics. In this research, Brown's assessment framework was utilized to investigate students' challenges in academic writing, focusing specifically on content, organization, discourse, and mechanics. It is crucial to introduce scoring rubrics for writing to students at the onset of the course so that they can understand the aspects of writing that will be evaluated by their instructors.

Students enrolled in the Management Study Program at Universitas Merdeka Pasuruan encountered challenges when tasked with writing academic essays. Merely a small proportion of students managed to successfully complete their academic writing courses. Despite the efforts of lecturers to provide guidance on academic writing and administer writing exercises, many students struggled to execute their writing tasks proficiently. In attempts to attain favourable scores on their writing assignments, some students resorted to plagiarism. However, engaging in plagiarism did not enhance the quality of their writing; rather, it deviated from the instructor's guidelines and veered off-topic. Consequently, this research aims to investigate the difficulties faced by students enrolled in the Management study program (ESP students) when writing English academic essays. While previous studies have explored similar topics, they primarily utilized mixed-method methodologies and were restricted to describing the challenging aspects of writing encountered by students. As a departure from prior research, this study employs a qualitative approach. By examining the problematic aspects of writing proposed by Brown & Abeywickrama (2019) and determining which difficulties are most prevalent, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered by ESP students in writing academic essay.

In light of these challenges, this current research-based paper seeks to explore the specific difficulties encountered by ESP students in writing academic essays, drawing on empirical research and theoretical

insights from the field of ESP. By examining the linguistic and disciplinary dimensions of ESP writing instruction, the researchers aim to deepen understanding of the complexities inherent in this process and identify strategies for educators to effectively support ESP students in developing their academic writing skills. Through this exploration, the researchers endeavour to enhance the efficacy of ESP programs and empower students to succeed in their academic and professional pursuits.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach to investigate the challenges encountered by ESP students, particularly economics students in composing English academic essays. This research was conducted in East Java, Indonesia. The qualitative component involved the documentation and analysis of students' English essays to ascertain these obstacles and semi structured interview. There are 10 second-semester students selected as participants of this study enrolled in the Management Study Program from one private university in East Java, Indonesia during the academic year 2023/2024. They were selected purposely to ensure a comprehensive yet focused examination of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This size of participants was chosen based on several considerations. Firstly, 10 students were deemed sufficient to provide a diverse range of perspectives and experiences regarding the difficulties encountered in academic essay writing. By including a sizable but manageable number of participants, the researchers could capture a broad spectrum of challenges while maintaining depth in the analysis of individual cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Secondly, the qualitative nature of the research necessitated in-depth exploration and rich description of participants' experiences, attitudes, and behaviours (Patton, 2015). A smaller sample size allowed for more intensive data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and detailed document analysis, enabling the researchers to gain a thorough understanding of the complexities involved in academic essay writing. Additionally, the selection of 10 students facilitated the practical aspects of data collection and analysis, such as transcription, coding, and thematic analysis. Managing a larger sample size might have posed logistical challenges and compromised the depth of analysis achievable within the constraints of the research timeframe and resources available. The participants are aged between 21 and 25 years. Six of them are already employed, while four are not yet employed. The students have similar levels of writing proficiency. Most of them are beginners since they come from non-English department students. Those ESP students are undergraduates who need English skills specific to their academic discipline and professional purposes. Most of the students may have a basic understanding of English but need to develop specific vocabulary and skills for their field.

The documentation and analysis of essays involved collecting student essays through direct submissions. Each essay was categorized and evaluated using a standardized rubric to assess aspects like organization, argumentation, originality, and mechanics. Quantitative data on common issues were recorded, and qualitative

analysis provided insights into specific writing challenges. This process helped identify key problems and inform targeted improvements.

Five participants were enlisted to ensure the acquisition of ample data. The interview guideline is adapted from Bulqiyah et al. (2021), comprising five items, were formulated through consultation with experts in relevant domains to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of students' challenges, including their strategies, processes, feedback, and essential in writing academic essay. Each interview session was conducted in the participants' native language, Bahasa Indonesia, spanned approximately 8 – 10 minutes per student. Interviewing in Bahasa Indonesia eliminates potential language barriers that might hinder effective communication between the researcher and the participants. This ensures that participants can articulate their thoughts, experiences, and challenges accurately and comprehensively. Subsequently, the data gleaned from the interviews underwent recording, transcription, coding, analysis, and presentation, culminating in a detailed exposition of findings.

The research collection consisted of 10 students' academic essays. Prior to essay composition, students were instructed to conduct a thorough analysis of their chosen topic, formulate underlying questions, devise a thesis statement, and outline their arguments. Subsequent to topic analysis and outlining, teacher feedback was provided for refinement, following which students proceeded to revise and finalize their essays. The assessment instrument employed in this study was adopted and modified the academic writing rubric developed by Brown & Abeywickrama (2019), encompassing six overarching categories: content (including thesis statement, related ideas, and development), organization (comprising introduction, logical sequence, and conclusion), discourse (encompassing topic sentences, paragraph unity, and cohesion), syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics (covering spelling, punctuation, and citation practices). This investigation focused exclusively on evaluating content, organization, discourse, and mechanics. Researchers meticulously analysed students' essays, recording observations, categorizing findings, and subsequently interpreting the gathered data.

In the current investigation, the researchers opted for manual coding of data derived from interviews and document analysis, deeming it a more judicious approach to mitigate errors and inaccuracies. The study employed diverse methodologies for data collection, emphasizing the crucial phase known as triangulation (Patton, 2015). Employing a grounded approach, researchers systematically categorized students' verbal narratives into thematic constructs during interviews, juxtaposing these findings with data sourced from participants' essays result. Subsequently, codes were aggregated to formulate overarching themes that provided insights into participants' challenges in writing academic essay.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Essay

The first result displayed the analysis from the students' essay to know the students' difficulties in writing academic essay. The table below showed the students' essay writing problems that divided into several essay dimension based on the assessment rubric provided by Brown & Abeywickrama (2019). The analysis can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. The Students' Essay Writing Problems

Dimensions	Description	Students' Problems
Organization (Writing Format)	Suitability and completeness of the format as in the template provided, written in Times New Roman 12 font 1.5 spacing	The format of their documents does not adhere to the template provided. For instance, some essays might have been single-spaced, used a different font like Arial, or had inconsistent heading styles, which do not align with the provided formatting guidelines.
Task completion	Whether the title and contents are in line with the call	Both the title and the content do not align with the requirements outlined in the call. For example, the call for papers required a title to be concise and relevant to the specific topic, such as "The Impact of Climate Change on Urban Planning." However, some students might have submitted titles like "My Thoughts on Environmental Issues," which are too broad or not directly related to the specific topic.
Originality	Creative/innovative ideas/similarity no more than 20%	Several sections of their work are directly copied from external sources without appropriate attribution. For example, a student essay that includes a paragraph on climate change impacts, where the text closely mirrors content from a published article, such as: " <i>According to Smith et al. (2020), climate change is accelerating the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, which poses significant risks to</i>

	<p><i>coastal communities.</i>" If this paragraph is copied verbatim from Smith et al.'s article without quotation marks or proper citation, it constitutes plagiarism.</p>
<p>Content and Discourse</p> <p>Introduction defines topic in line with the call, general information regarding the topic of writing, problem(s), reason(s) of why the topic is important to study, literature review, context of the paper, purpose(s) / argument(s), thesis statement</p>	<p>It does not clearly define the topic in line with the call. Moreover, the introduction lacks sufficient general information about the topic. The students does not adequately explain why the topic is important to study. The introduction also lacks a brief literature review. Including a summary of relevant literature that can help establish the context and background for the essay. The introduction lacks a clear thesis statement that clearly outlines the main argument or purpose of the essay. For example, an essay on <i>"The Effects of Renewable Energy Adoption on Economic Growth."</i> If the student writes: <i>"Renewable energy is important because it helps the environment,"</i> without further elaboration on why this is significant in the context of economic growth, such as discussing specific economic benefits, policy implications, or data supporting the impact, this lacks a thorough explanation of the topic's importance.</p>
	<p>Body sections elaborate of the purpose(s) / argument(s) supported strong by evidence / citations. The discussion contains main idea and topic sentence, supported ideas and sentences (evidence(s), and conclusion</p>
	<p>Some paragraphs lack clear main ideas, topic sentences, and some of the arguments in the body sections are not adequately supported by evidence or citations.</p>
<p>Writing Mechanic</p>	<p>Their conclusion is missing a restatement of the purpose(s) they presented in the introduction.</p> <p>The references are not consistently formatted in line with the in-text citations. Additionally, the majority of their references</p>

References in line with in-text citations and consistent style (within the past 10 or 5 years at most)	are not within the past 10 or 5 years, as specified in the assignment guidelines.
Reasonable length (no more than 1500 words)	Their essay exceeds the maximum word limit of 1500 words specified in the assignment instructions.
Proper language use (word choice), accurate mechanics (good grammar), proper punctuation, cohesion and coherence, and spelling	Some inconsistencies in the use of terminology. For example: in one section they mention "climate change" while in another section, they used the term "global warming" to describe the same phenomenon. The students also have difficulty to find the appropriate English words. They used the phrase "environmental pollution" followed by "environmental degradation," which may not be entirely synonymous. There are also several grammatical errors, the incorrect example is: "The scientist's research has been proven invaluable for the field, it's contributions are widely acknowledged." Corrected: "The scientist's research has proven invaluable for the field; its contributions are widely acknowledged." The transition between paragraphs is abrupt, making it difficult for the reader to follow the progression of ideas. Some paragraphs contain unrelated or tangential information that distracts from the main argument. Incorrect example is: "Enviornment", corrected: "Environment". In the example provided, "enviornment" is misspelled. The corrected version shows the correct spelling of the word "environment."

The analysis of students' essay writing problems presented in the table above reveals several key areas of concern. These include issues with organization (writing format), task completion, originality, content and discourse, and writing mechanics. For instance, students often struggle with organizing their essays in a coherent structure, leading to difficulties in conveying their arguments effectively. Additionally, some essays

lack originality, as students may rely too heavily on common ideas or fail to present fresh perspectives. Moreover, there are instances of incomplete task fulfilment, where essays may not fully address the requirements of the prompt or question. Content and discourse problems also arise, such as insufficient development of ideas or weak argumentation. Furthermore, writing mechanics errors, including grammatical inaccuracies, punctuation mistakes, and spelling errors, detract from the overall quality of the essays. An example of a student's error in writing an essay may involve a lack of clear paragraph organization, incomplete addressing of the essay prompt, reliance on clichéd arguments without offering new insights, inadequate development of ideas, and numerous mechanical errors throughout the text, such as incorrect punctuation usage and spelling mistakes.

In writing, there are several process approach to writing which emphasizes the importance of organization, task fulfilment, originality, content development, and mechanical accuracy in effective writing. This approach, supported by Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) and Mohammed (2021), suggest that writing is a recursive process involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing. By connecting these aspects to the identified issues, students can better understand the underlying causes and potential solutions for these problems. The process approach highlights the importance of organization in writing, which involves structuring an essay in a coherent manner to effectively convey arguments. The observed difficulties with organization in students' essays, such as unclear paragraph structure, can be explained by a lack of emphasis on the planning and outlining stages in their writing process. As Mohammed (2021) suggests, thorough planning and outlining are crucial for producing well-organized texts.

Task completion is another critical aspect emphasized in the process approach. The observed instances of incomplete task fulfilment, where essays do not fully address the prompt or question, indicate that students may need more guidance in interpreting and responding to writing tasks. According to the aspects explained above, understanding the task and its requirements is a fundamental step in the writing process. The experts also underscores the importance of originality and content development. The reliance on common ideas and lack of fresh perspectives in students' essays can be linked to insufficient emphasis on brainstorming and idea generation stages. Encouraging students to engage in pre-writing activities, such as mind mapping or free writing, can help foster originality and more robust content development (Ziegler & Lehner, 2021).

Discourse problems, such as weak argumentation and insufficient development of ideas, align with the process approach's focus on revising and refining ideas. Brown & Abeywickrama (2010) suggest that students need to be taught how to critically evaluate and develop their arguments during the revision stage to enhance the depth and clarity of their essays. Finally, writing mechanics errors, including grammatical inaccuracies, punctuation mistakes, and spelling errors, can be attributed to inadequate editing and proofreading practices. The process approach emphasizes the importance of multiple drafts and peer reviews to identify and correct such errors, thereby improving the overall quality of the writing. An example of a

student's error in writing an essay, such as a lack of clear paragraph organization, incomplete addressing of the essay prompt, reliance on clichéd arguments, inadequate development of ideas, and numerous mechanical errors, can be better understood through the lens of the process approach. By incorporating stages of planning, drafting, revising, and editing into their writing practice, students can develop more coherent, original, and mechanically accurate essays.

Semi-Structured Interview

In order to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of students' challenges in essay composition, the researchers undertook semi-structured interviews as a means of exploring participants' viewpoints on various dimensions. This individualized interviewing approach was administered to five participants. The outcomes of these interviews were categorized into five principal themes, namely: Students' challenges encountered in essay writing, the processes involved in essay composition, strategies employed in essay writing, feedback mechanisms within essay writing, and the significance attributed to essay writing. The result of the interview can be seen in the following excerpts.

Theme 1: Students' challenges encountered in essay writing

Students face various challenges in essay writing, namely generating original ideas, organizing thoughts coherently, balancing evidence without causing information overload, and navigating the overall complexity of the process. Strategies to overcome these issues include brainstorming, creating detailed outlines, focusing on quality over quantity, and seeking regular feedback and practice.

S1: *"One of the main challenges I encounter is generating ideas for my essays. Sometimes, I struggle to come up with original and engaging topics that have not been overdone before."*

S2: *"The challenge for me is organizing my thoughts coherently. I often find it hard to structure my essay in a way that flows logically from one point to the next."*

S3: *"I find it difficult to strike the right balance between providing enough evidence to support my arguments and avoiding information overload. Sometimes, I feel like I am either including too much or too little information."*

S4: *"It is a complex process that requires a lot of practice and refinement."*

Theme 2: The processes involved in essay composition

Students follow a systematic approach to essay writing, they are the students begin by thoroughly understanding the essay prompt, then conduct research to gather relevant information and sources. Next, they create an outline to structure their thoughts, and finally, draft the essay by writing the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion, incorporating evidence from their research.

S1: *"The first step for me is understanding the essay prompt or question. I make sure to analyse it carefully to grasp what is being asked of me."*

S2: *"I conduct research to gather relevant information and sources. This involves searching for scholarly articles, books, and other credible sources that I can use to support my arguments."*

S3: *"I create an outline for my essay. This helps me structure my thoughts and decide on the main points and subpoints that I want to include in each section."*

S4: *"I start to write draft the essay. I write the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion, making sure to incorporate evidence from my research to support my arguments."*

Theme 3: Strategies employed in essay writing

Students use various strategies to improve their essay writing: brainstorming ideas before starting, creating an outline to ensure clear structure, and writing body paragraphs first to establish a strong foundation. Additionally, taking breaks to overcome writer's block and discussing ideas with others for feedback and new insights are also helpful techniques.

S2: *"One strategy I find helpful is brainstorming. Before I start writing, I take some time to generate ideas and jot down any thoughts or insights related to the topic."*

S3: *"The strategy I use is creating an outline. It helps me organize my thoughts and ensures that my essay has a clear structure with well-defined sections."*

S4: *"I focus on writing the body paragraphs first. I find that tackling the main arguments and supporting evidence early on helps me establish a strong foundation for the rest of the essay."*

S5: *"When I encounter writer's block, I try to take a break and come back to it later with a fresh perspective. Sometimes, I also find it helpful to discuss my ideas with a friend or colleague to get feedback and new insights."*

Theme 4: Feedback mechanisms within essay writing

Students utilize peer review and feedback from instructors or mentors as key mechanisms for improving their essays. Peer review offers diverse perspectives and helps identify overlooked issues, while feedback from instructors provides expert guidance and suggestions for refinement.

S1: *"One feedback mechanism I often employ is peer review. After completing a draft, I share it with a peer or colleague for their feedback and constructive criticism."*

S2: *"Peer review allows me to gain insights from a different perspective. My peers often notice things that I may have overlooked, such as unclear arguments or grammatical errors."*

S3: *"The feedback mechanism I use is seeking feedback from instructors or mentors. They provide valuable guidance and suggestions for improvement based on their expertise and experience."*

S4: *"I carefully consider each suggestion and revise my essay accordingly. I prioritize addressing any areas of weakness or ambiguity identified by my peers and instructors."*

Theme 5: The significance attributed to essay writing

Essay writing holds personal and academic significance for students as it allows them to express thoughts coherently and enhances critical thinking skills by analysing complex concepts and formulating arguments with evidence. Furthermore, essay writing aids in developing communication skills, which are essential for conveying ideas effectively in both written assignments and verbal presentations, with acquired skills being valuable across diverse professional settings.

S2: *"Essay writing holds significant importance for me personally and academically. Firstly, it serves as a means for me to express my thoughts and ideas in a structured and coherent manner."*

S3: *"Essay writing plays a crucial role in my academic development by enhancing my critical thinking and analytical skills. It requires me to analyse complex concepts, formulate arguments, and support them with evidence, which deepens my understanding of the subject matter."*

S4: *"Essay writing helps me develop my communication skills. It enables me to convey my thoughts effectively to others, whether it is through written assignments or verbal presentations based on my written work."*

S5: *"The skills I acquire through essay writing, such as research, critical analysis, and effective communication, are valuable in various professional settings. Whether it is writing reports, proposals, or articles, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and persuasively is highly sought after."*

According to the interview excerpts, it is apparent that the participants face obstacles in the process of essay composition, namely: (1) affective hindrances stemming from teacher conduct during teaching sessions and student involvement in essay composition, (2) cognitive challenges linked to idea generation and the procedural aspects of writing, and (3) linguistic concerns spanning grammatical accuracy, coherence, and lexical mastery.

The research on the challenges faced by ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students in writing academic essays reveals a variety of issues that resonate with recent findings in the field, while also introducing new perspectives. The linguistic difficulties encountered by ESP students, particularly in mastering academic vocabulary and complex grammatical structures, continue to be a significant barrier. Bulqiyah et al. (2021), echo these findings, emphasizing that despite improvements in general English proficiency, many ESP students struggle with the specialized language required for academic writing. This research confirms that these students often make grammatical errors and misuse vocabulary, which impairs the clarity and coherence of their essays. The ongoing need for targeted linguistic support is evident, underscoring the importance of specialized language courses that focus on academic writing skills.

Differences in educational background remain a critical factor affecting ESP students' writing abilities. Pennington & Richards (2016), highlight that students from educational systems focused on rote learning often lack the critical thinking and organizational skills needed for effective academic writing. Educational systems that prioritize rote learning typically emphasize memorization and repetition over analytical and creative

thinking. This approach can hinder the development of critical thinking skills, which are essential for constructing well-reasoned arguments and presenting original ideas in writing. In contrast, systems that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving help students develop the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information, leading to more sophisticated and coherent writing. This research corroborates these findings, showing that many ESP students struggle to develop and structure their ideas cohesively. The recommendation for integrating writing-intensive courses into ESP programs aligns with current pedagogical trends that advocate for more practice-oriented and interactive learning environments. Such courses can help students progressively build their writing skills through continuous practice and feedback.

Cultural differences continue to pose significant challenges for ESP students. Farahsani et al. (2023) has further explored how cultural backgrounds influence students' writing styles and their adaptation to Western academic norms. This study supports these findings, emphasizing that many ESP students are unfamiliar with the expectations of Western academic writing, such as the preference for explicit argumentation and critical analysis. The anxiety and lack of confidence that result from these cultural disparities are notable obstacles. Students from high-context cultures, where communication is subtle and relies on shared understanding, often struggle with the direct and explicit style required in Western academic writing. Similarly, those from collectivist backgrounds may find it difficult to engage in the critical analysis and individualistic argumentation that Western academia values. Additionally, students accustomed to teacher-centered education, which focuses on memorization and passive learning, may have trouble adapting to the student-centered, self-directed learning expected in Western settings. These cultural disparities contribute to anxiety and a lack of confidence, making it challenging for students to meet Western academic writing expectations effectively. The suggestion to provide cultural orientation sessions is consistent with current best practices, which advocate for comprehensive support that includes cultural as well as linguistic education.

The issue of limited practice and inadequate feedback is another area where recent research aligns with the current study's findings. Studies by Sadeghi et al., (2019) highlight the crucial role of regular writing practice and detailed feedback in improving students' writing skills. This research emphasizes that without sufficient practice and constructive feedback, ESP students struggle to make significant progress. The recommendation to implement regular writing assignments and establish mechanisms for detailed instructor feedback is well-supported by recent literature. These strategies are essential for helping students identify their weaknesses and improve their writing through iterative practice.

A new perspective highlighted by this research is the role of emerging technologies and modern resources in supporting ESP students' writing development. Rachmawati & Hastari (2022) have explored the potential of digital tools and online platforms in enhancing language learning. This research suggests that writing centres and online resources can provide valuable support, enabling students to access help outside the classroom and practice their writing independently. The integration of technology in writing instruction

represents a contemporary approach that complements traditional teaching methods, offering additional avenues for students to develop their skills.

In summary, the challenges faced by ESP students in writing academic essays, as identified in this research, are consistent with those documented in the latest studies. The linguistic difficulties, impact of educational background, cultural differences, and need for regular practice and feedback are well-established themes. However, the current study also introduces new insights regarding the use of modern resources and technology to support writing development. By addressing these challenges comprehensively and leveraging both traditional and innovative approaches, educational institutions can better support ESP students in overcoming their obstacles and achieving academic success.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of the challenges faced by ESP students in writing academic essays reveals a complex interplay of linguistic hurdles, unfamiliar academic conventions, and limited practice opportunities. These students often struggle to bridge the gap between general English proficiency and the specialized demands of academic writing. Their difficulties in mastering grammar, vocabulary, and essay structure impede their ability to produce coherent and well-argued essays, ultimately affecting their academic success. Understanding these challenges is crucial for educators and institutions aiming to support ESP students more effectively. To address these issues, several strategic measures are recommended. First, providing enhanced language support tailored to academic writing can help students develop the necessary vocabulary and grammatical skills. Integrating writing-intensive courses into the curriculum will offer students more opportunities to practice and refine their writing abilities. Additionally, cultural orientation sessions can familiarize students with the academic conventions and expectations of Western institutions, reducing the cultural barriers they face.

Regular practice, combined with constructive and detailed feedback from instructors, can further aid students in improving their writing skills. Establishing accessible writing resources, such as writing centres and online platforms, can offer continuous support and guidance. Implementing these suggestions has far-reaching implications for both students and educational institutions. By addressing the specific challenges faced by ESP students, institutions can enhance their academic performance and overall confidence in writing. This, in turn, can lead to better academic outcomes and greater student satisfaction. Furthermore, a supportive learning environment that prioritizes the development of academic writing skills can prepare students more effectively for their professional futures, making them more competitive in the global job market. Ultimately, institutions that adopt these strategies will not only help individual students succeed but also contribute to the advancement of a more competent and capable academic community.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed Alsamadani, H. (2017). Needs Analysis in ESP Context: Saudi Engineering Students as a Case Study. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(6), 58. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.6p.58>
- Ariyanti, A., & Fitriana, R. (2017). EFL Students' Difficulties and Needs in Essay Writing. *International Conference on Teacher Training and Education 2017 (ICTTE 2017)*, 158, 111–121.
- Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2010). Language Assessment, Principles and Classroom Practices, Second Edition. In *Sifonoforos* (Vol. 1, Issue August 2015). Pearson Longman.
- Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2019). *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices Third Edition*. Pearson.
- Bulqiyah, S., Arif, M., & Ayu, D. (2021). Investigating Writing Difficulties in Essay Writing: Tertiary Students' Perspectives. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 4(1), 61–73.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Farahsani, Y., Rini, I. P., & Jaya, P. H. (2023). *Problems in Learning Essay Writing for English for Specific Purpose Students: A Case Study in Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta* (Vol. 1). Atlantis Press SARL. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-038-1>
- Febriani, T. N. (2023). "Writing is challenging": Factors Contributing to Undergraduate Students' Difficulties in Writing English Essays. *Erudita: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 2(1), 83–93.
- Isma, A., Rasmin, L. O., Hutauruk, T. L., Lestari, I. W., Yuzar, E., Evenddy, S. S., Hamer, W., Wandira, B., Achmad, S., & Rahman, F. (2023). *ESP Pedagogy: Designing Effective English for Specific Purposes Courses (1st ed.)*. Yayasan Kita Menulis.
- Lebedev, A. V., Pinkovetskaia, I. S., Rozhkov, M. A., & Tsybina, L. V. (2020). Implementation and peculiarities of English for specific purposes course design at Ogarev's Mordovia State University. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 178–182. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080122>
- Meiranti, R. (2013). Improving Students' Writing Skills Through Field Trip Method. *ENGLISH REVIEW: Journal of English Education*, 1(1), 1–8.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation (Fourth Edition)*. Jossey-Bass A Wiley Brand.
- Mohammed, M. A. S. (2021). Does Teacher Feedback Mode Matter for Language Students? *Asian EFL Journal*, 28(11), 202–227.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods: Fourth Edition*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (2016). Teacher Identity in Language Teaching: Integrating Personal, Contextual, and Professional Factors. *RELC Journal*, 47(1), 5–23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688216631219>
- Rachmawati, D. L. (2021). Do Teachers' Attitudes and Knowledge toward HOTS Essential in Creating Critical Thinkers? *Journal of English Educators Society*, 1–18.
- Rachmawati, D. L., & Hastari, S. (2022). *Formative Assessment as an Innovative Strategies to Develop ESP Students' Writing Skills*. 6(1), 78–90.
- Rachmawati, D. L., Hastari, S., & Dwiharto, J. (2021). *Need Analysis to Create a Better Instruction and Material for ESP Management Students*. 4(3), 283–297.



- Rohmatillah. (2014). A Study On Students' Difficulties In Learning Vocabulary Rohmatillah Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Raden Intan Lampung. *Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Raden Intan Lampung*, 69–86.
- Sadeghi, K., Richards, J. C., & Ghaderi, F. (2019). Perceived versus Measured Teaching Effectiveness: Does Teacher Proficiency Matter? *RELC Journal*, 51(2), 280–293. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688219845933>
- Silvia, R. (2024). Writing Challenges and Strategies in ESP Contexts: Pharmacy Students' Perception. *Jurnal Inovasi Edukasi*, 07(01), 14–22.
- Wulyani, A. N., Elgort, I., & Coxhead, A. (2019). Exploring EFL teachers' English language proficiency: Lessons from Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9(2), 263–274. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v9i2.20217>
- Ziegler, J. R., & Lehner, E. (2021). Blackboard Microengagement, Formative Assessment, and Writing Achievement in First-Year College Composition: A Case Study. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 45(5), 366–369. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2020.1716873>

Copyright: ©2024 *JETLEE*: Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature.