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COMMON ERRORS IN COMPOSING AN ACADEMIC WRITING: A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY IN HIGHER EDUCATION SETTING

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Abstract: This study was aimed at examining frequent errors found in student academic writing, namely the abstract for proposal, as well as their knowledge and problems they faced in composing an academic writing. The study was conducted in a descriptive qualitative method framework, involving students in an academic writing class. The participants of the study were seven students in the writing class. The instruments used in this study were student works, focus group discussion, and a quiz. The results showed that the frequent errors found in student works included the use and selection of connectors, mechanical errors, redundancy, incorrect complex sentence structures, sentence structures (subject and predicate agreement), and incomplete and/or inaccurate content. The main problems involved difficulties in arranging coherent writing, ordering the word correctly, choosing and selecting connectors, choosing formal words, and acknowledging the mistakes. Meanwhile, the data on student knowledge showed that students had been aware of the structure of an abstract and all elements needed in an abstract. The findings imply that interventions for improving the student ability in evaluating their own work is vital, such as corrective feedback, the use of language tools, and extensive writing programs containing repetitive editing.

Keywords: academic writing, coherence, connectors, errors in writing, problems in writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an enjoyable activity to learn, but for some people, it can be a wearisome yet challenging activity (Pasaribu, 2022). One of the types of writing is academic writing. One of the most essential characteristics of academic writing lies on its process which includes searching for, finding, and evaluating information through mental processes and interpretation and reconstruction (Akkaya & Aydin, 2018). Therefore, academic writing seems to be one of the most crucial, but hard, intellectual abilities for university students to master (Sajjad et al., 2021; Dewi et al., 2023).

Many assignments require the ability to compose an academic writing work in college, such as essays, reports, papers, and final papers. Therefore, at tertiary levels, the capacity to write well academically becomes a plausible expectation of university students (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). For instance, a final paper must be approved before students acquire their bachelor degree (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2020).

Academic writing performance has also become a challenge for most university students on final year in Indonesia, because they are required to submit a final report (Fitriani et al., 2021). There are a number of problems faced by students in the process of writing academically. The problems include mechanical problems, such as vocabulary, word choices, and paraphrasing (Sajjad et al., 2021) that might lead to some errors in writing. The errors in academic writing can include the errors in relation to punctuation, spellings, prepositions, sentence structures, vocabulary, idea development, use of articles, and use of irregular verbs (Al-Tamimi, 2018).

Improving the accuracy student writing is an important factor in effective writing (Baleghizadeh & Gordani, 2012). To improve the accuracy, we should firstly identify the aspects that needs improvement and evaluate the common challenges and mistakes found in the product of the student works as well as in the process. For this reason, acknowledging the factors causing academic writing difficult for university students need to be considered (Nenotek et al., 2022). A number of research had conducted a study on error analysis. For example, the study of Fitriani et al. (2021) had investigated the errors in the abstract. Furthermore, besides study on error analysis, a number of studies on the intervention to improve student performance in writing an academic writing had also been carried out. For example, Shin et al. (2018) had developed lexical bundles as a tool to identify and analyze definite article use by L2 learners.

Studies related to error analysis had also been conducted on student writing written in student first language, namely Indonesian language. Most of the research studied only errors in language levels. For example, Maulida et al. (2021) analyzed student bachelor thesis written in student first language, Indonesian language, according to the level of error, including spelling, morphology, and syntax levels. Nurwicaksono & Amelia (2018) studied the types of error in student book review written in their first language. Syafi'i et al. (2021) conducted a research analyzing student papers written in their first language according to language errors at morphology level. Furthermore, Nurhayatin et al. (2018) studied errors in student papers written in Indonesian language.

Problems faced by students in writing seems to be one of the instructor concerns in writing classrooms, as well as in other classes. The problem faced by students in writing class can be revealed by finding the common mistakes in their writing and challenges in the process of writing. For this reason, analyzing the problems as well as errors in composing academic writing papers is essential. As stated by Ho & Duong (2015), finding out the common errors frequently occurred on student writing papers has always been administered by writing instructors in the classrooms. Although many studies had been conducted in the field of academic writing, including in analysis and intervention, such as the study of Fitriani et al. (2021) analyzing the mistakes in abstract written in English language by Indonesian students, the study that specifically examines the errors and problems in composing academic writing, specifically an abstract, in student first language, namely Indonesia language, is scarce. Meanwhile, examining the student initial and basic capacity and knowledge is vital before enabling them to well write an academic paper in other language. Therefore, this study was aimed at

examining the common errors found in student academic writing papers written in their first language, as well as the problems they faced and their initial knowledge on academic writing both from the language structure perspective and content perspective. The study is expected to provide an insight related to the common mistakes in student works, specifically academic works, and student knowledge and challenges in composing an academic writing to further develop an effective intervention as well as a helpful application/tool.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic writing is usually referred to as logical writing defined as a systematic study conducted and used by researchers at a higher level of education (Sajjad et al., 2021). Academic writing involves the process of sharing original research with other scholars based on certain standard rules, which should correctly follow the steps of scientific academic writing process (Akkaya & Aydin, 2018). Academic writing should be clear, focused, concise, ordered, and provided with evidence to improve the reader comprehension (Sajjad et al., 2021). Writing skill is considered as a challenging language skill for language learners to master since it demands tenacity, patience, and a solid commitment to practice writing skills as it is a matter of word choice, grammar, and to express writing ideas clearly and coherently (Pasaribu, 2022). Therefore, developing student skills in writing and in solving the problems during the process of writing to improve the quality of the product of student academic writing is essential.

Errors in Academic Writing

In terms of level, language errors can be found in four levels, including at spelling, morphology, syntax, and semantics levels (Maulida et al., 2021). Meanwhile, regarding types of error, according to Corder (in Moiden & Liaw, 2023) there are three types of language errors, namely mistakes, lapses, and errors. 'Lapses' is a deviation in the use of language that happens due to the shift in the topic because the speaker changes the way of expressing something before the whole sentence is fully stated; in this error, the language user is not aware of the mistake as this error transpires accidentally (Corder, 1981 in Moiden & Liaw, 2023). Furthermore, 'mistake' is a deviation in language use, when speaking or writing, because the user does not use the language correctly according to the circumstances, while 'error' is a deviation from the use of language from the standard structure because the user has not mastered the grammar (Corder, 1981 in Moiden & Liaw, 2023).

A number of research had examined the mistakes and weaknesses in academic writing. The mistakes and weakness include the mistakes in writing, such as mechanical errors, and the process, such as the difficulty in the evaluation process. Akkaya & Aydin (2018) conducted a close analysis of recent academic texts, revealing a wide range of mistakes or shortcomings. The study of (Sajjad et al., 2021) had found that students have a number of challenges when it comes to academic writing, especially in terms of vocabulary, word choice, and paraphrasing (Sajjad et al., 2021). Moreover, the study of Saputra (2022) showed that the difficulties include grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. In addition, Fitriani et al. (2021) stated that a study found three main language problems faced by the students, namely punctuation, sentence structure, and spelling (Fitriani et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Giridharan & Robson (2011) said that many respondents were unable to evaluate their own work and confessed that their evaluation did not match that of their instructors many times.

In Indonesian language, there had been numerous research studying errors in writing, both academic and non-academic writing, written by students speaking Indonesia language as their first language. Nurhayatin et al. (2018) studied errors in student paper written in Indonesian language. The study found that most mistakes were found in using sentence structure, spelling, and diction that prevent author to use effective sentences (Nurhayatin et al., 2018). Maulida et al. (2021) analyzed student bachelor thesis written in student first language according to the level of error, namely spelling, morphology, and syntax levels. The findings of the study showed that there were more errors in spelling, for instance the particle category *di-* and standard language or borrowed language that already has translation (Maulida et al., 2021). Nurwicaksono & Amelia (2018) studied the types of error in student book review written in their first language, revealing that language errors were mostly found in the error category (89.08%), followed by mistake category (10.71%), and lapses category (0.2%). In addition, Syafi'i et al. (2021) conducted a research analyzing student papers written in their first language according to errors in language in morphology level, revealing that there were thirteen kinds of errors in the field of morphology in the student paper.

Intervention for Academic Writing Class

Besides the study on the frequent errors and problems, the study related to intervention in writing had also been conducted. The interventions are needed to improve student skills in writing and to improve the quality of the papers. The interventions that had been previously studied and developed include the strategy applied in the classroom, such as the use of corrective feedback, and the application to help improve the quality of the paper. Chintaradeja (2020) conducted research to investigate the errors in paragraph writing in academic writing class of Thai undergraduate students by focusing on the frequency distribution of error types in the paragraph. In addition, Müller et al. (2017) investigated the use of corrective feedback showing that the combination of instruction and feedback, both indirect and then direct, could improve student written accuracy more than they could be equitably expected to achieve on their own.

The study of Baleghizadeh & Gordani (2012) found significant immediate and delayed effects for the student-teacher conference type of feedback on student overall accuracy improvement. Meanwhile, Xie (2019) had developed an item bank approach for developing diagnostic tests, indicating that it was useful as it provided more precise information about knowledge gaps than the corpus-based textual analysis and had the potential to pinpoint high priority areas for remedial instruction. In addition, in Indonesian language, some research also developed and analyzed applications for detecting errors. For example, Ilmiyah & Qoiriah (2021) studied the use of Boyer-Moore algorithm as an efficient algorithm for word or string search applications, providing evidence that the Boyer-Moore algorithm can detect errors with an average precision value of 0.969, recall value of 0.976, and accuracy value of 0.917. Moreover, Frando et al. (2019) developed a writing check application equipped with a suggestion for improvement features named Jaro Winkler Distance on a web-based application.

Previous studies had examined a wide range of research related to academic writing, including the shortcomings, capacity, and interventions. However, there are still gaps to answer, including the capacity in writing academic writing for certain purpose in student first language aimed to prevail the student initial capacity.

Acknowledging the student initial capacity seems to be vital to decide next moves and interventions to improve their academic writing competence in other languages.

METHOD

This study was conducted in a descriptive qualitative study framework. A qualitative study was chosen to deeply explore the research questions, including the frequent errors, problems, and knowledge of students in academic writing. The study was conducted in an academic writing class for PETE (Physical Education Teacher Education) students of a university in Bandung. The students were in their sixth semester speaking Indonesian language as their first language. The academic writing class was conducted to prepare students for writing both a research proposal and final research. The participants of this study included all of the students in the class, namely seven students. However, after conducting data cleaning, only data from five students were eligible to be further analyzed. The data from two students were excluded as one student did not attend the focus group discussion and one student did not follow the instruction of the assignment (abstract for proposal) that the work was not eligible to be analyzed.

The instruments used in this study were student writing works, focus group discussion, and a quiz. The abstract was chosen as an abstract contains a summary of the paper, thus it was expected to reflect the student overall understanding and skill regarding the proposal structure, content, and writing structure. The abstract was written in the student first language, namely Indonesian language. The student first language, Indonesian language, was chosen by researcher to find out the student initial basic language skill, thus the correct intervention could be carried out before demanding them to compile their work in foreign language, for instance English language. This instrument was used to examine the frequent errors in the writing. This study focused examining errors on the content, structure, and language use.

The focus group discussion was conducted to prevail the problems that the students often faced in compiling an academic writing. In FGD, all of the participants were included. During the FGD, the researcher gave questions related to their problems in writing an academic writing paper and the students were allowed to answer the question related to the problems (challenges and difficulties) according to their perspective and experience in writing an academic writing. Meanwhile, the quiz was administered to examine the knowledge in academic writing. The quiz was arranged in three formats, including analysis, short essay, and open-ended questions. In the first format, the students should analyse an abstract, including its function, structure, and the content of the abstract. The second format, the short essay, the students should answer the common questions related to their knowledge related to an abstract. The third format, open-ended questions, included questions related to their problems (challenges and difficulties) in writing an academic essay. All of the three formats were given to examine the student knowledge related to abstract and academic writings and problems, including challenges and difficulties, in composing an academic writing. The data were taken in April 2023.

The obtained data were analyzed in inductive analysis. The data gained from the three instruments, namely student works, quiz, and focus group discussion were confirmed and triangulated to ensure their validity. The data from their works (abstracts) and their quizzes were analysed according to the common mistakes found in their works (abstracts) and their quizzes. The data were then categorized into two categories,

including writing related errors and content related errors. The writing related errors included five errors, for instance the use and selection of connectors and prepositions, mechanical errors, redundance, incorrect complex sentence, and sentence structure (subject and predicate agreement). The content related errors consisted of the completeness of the content and the accuracy of the content. Meanwhile, the focus group discussion was analyzed according to the student response to the given questions during discussion. The responses were categorized into knowledge and perceived problems. The obtained and categorized data were then calculated using frequency converted into percentage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to mainly examine the common errors found in student academic writing products, namely the abstract for proposal. In addition, the study also tried to find out the student knowledge and perceived problems in composing academic writings. The data gained from focus group discussion, quiz, and student work were analysed, elaborated, and presented in two sections, namely frequent errors and student knowledge and perceived problems.

Frequent Errors

The frequent errors in composing an abstract for proposal was the first question to answer. The errors was divided into two categories, for instance Errors in Writing and Errors in Content. The findings are presented in the following sections, as well as the discussion for each category.

Errors in Writing Analysis

The result of the analysis from the student works found that there were five major mistakes in writing an abstract for proposal. Those five errors included the use and selection of connectors and prepositions, mechanical errors, redundance, incorrect complex sentence, and sentence structure (subject and predicate agreement).

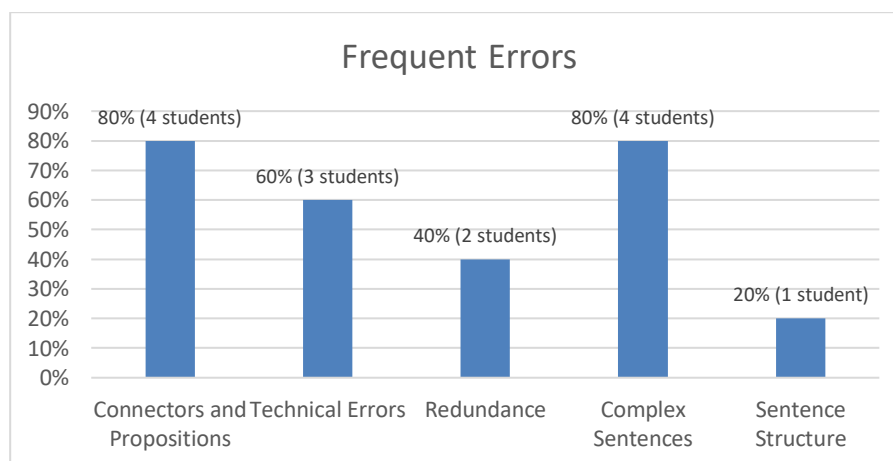


Figure 1. Frequent errors in writing

Data in Figure 1 show that error in selecting and using connectors and propositions was found in 80% of student work (4 student works), which included missing connectors, adding unnecessary connectors, and selecting wrong connectors. Errors in composing complex sentences was found in 80% of student work (4 student works).

Most students tended to write the abstract in a complex sentence. They might want to express their ideas all at once. However, the structure of the sentence was inaccurate that might reduce the coherent of the writing. More than half of the students (60%) made mistakes in mechanical aspects, such as spelling, use of comma, capital letter, and other technical mistakes. Few numbers of students used redundance words that made the sentence less effective. Lastly, the error in sentence structure, specifically the agreement of subject and predicate was found in one student work. This error created an ambiguity and highly reduce the readability of the sentence.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was conducted the examine the completeness of the content and the accuracy of the content. The result of the content analysis is presented in Figure 2.

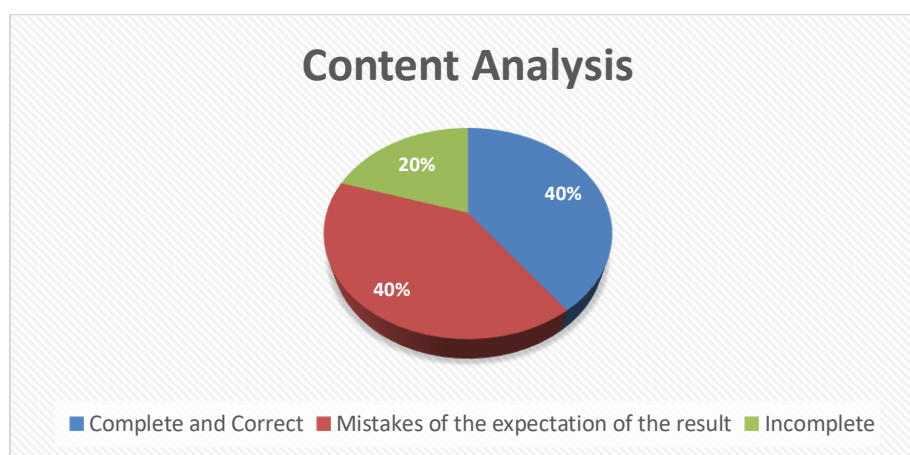


Figure 1. Content analysis

The data in Figure two show that two students (40%) had written the work completely and accurately. Two students (40%) had written the abstract completely but there had been a mistake in the expectation of the study. An abstract of a research (that has been conducted) should include five components, including background of the research, aim of the research, method of the research, main findings, and implications of the research. Meanwhile, an abstract for a proposal should include background of the study, aim of the study, method of (to be used in) the study, and the expected benefits of the study, not the (assumption of) research results, since the result itself had not beed conducted. Meanwhile, one student (20%) had an incomplete work. The work only included background, purpose, and method, but neglected the expectation of the study.

The findings of the study had revealed that the errors found in student papers were related to writing structure and content components. This is in line with the finding of study of Nenotek et al. (2022) showing that students still experienced severe difficulties in four aspects of academic writing, namely content, organization, discourse, and mechanics. The errors in writing structure found in this study included the use and selection of connectors and prepositions, mechanical errors, redundance, incorrect complex sentence, and sentence structure (subject and predicate agreement). The findings of this study are relevant with the finding of other studies, such as the study of Al-Tamimi (2018) which found that students made many errors in academic writing in relation to sentence structure, vocabulary, and expressing ideas, punctuation, prepositions, spelling, use of articles and use of irregular verbs and study of Sajjad et al.

(2021) which found that students had a number of challenges when it comes to academic writing, particularly in terms of word choice, vocabulary, and paraphrasing.

It is also in line with the study conducted of Chintaradeja (2020) which found that the most frequent error was subject-verb agreement and the least frequent error was punctuation-comma splice and the study of Amiri & Puteh (2017) finding that four most common English language errors committed by the participants included sentence structure, articles, punctuation and capitalization. Lastly, the finding also corresponds to the finding of Demirel (2017) study showing that the learners prefer to use complex sentences rather than simple sentences in their essays. According to findings of this study, improving student mastery in mechanical context such as language structure, vocabulary, and punctuation is essential to make an effective and understandable writing. As stated by Saputra (2022), vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation mastery will make the language understandable.

Another mistake found in this study was related to content aspect. The finding showed that the mistake mostly found in result section. This in line with findings of a previous study conducted by Akkaya & Aydin (2018). The study found that the academicians presented the highest number of comments about the characteristics related to sections containing "methodology" and "results, discussions, and suggestions". The mistakes were found in terms of incompleteness and/or inaccuracy. This mistake should be considered as the content of an academic writing serves a certain purpose.

Student Knowledge and Perceived Problems

Student knowledge and problems in writing an abstract for proposal were examined from focus group discussion and the quiz. In the quiz, the students were asked to identify the function, structure, and the content of the abstract, to answer the common questions related to their knowledge related to an abstract, and to answer questions related to their problems (challenges and difficulties) in writing an academic essay. Meanwhile focus group discussion was carried out to discuss the main problems they commonly faced when writing an abstract for a proposal, which include the problems related to language structure and content.

According to the data from quiz, all of students had been aware of the structure of an abstract and all elements needed in an abstract. However, the students had not been able to analyse the content comprehensively. It might be because the abstract given was written in English and had a limited time to complete the quiz. Meanwhile, according to the focus group discussion, there were five problems in composing an academic writing, including the problem in writing a coherent writing, ordering the word correctly, choosing and selecting connectors, choosing formal words, and acknowledging the mistakes.

The results of analysis of this study also found problems in writing academic writing perceived by students. The results indicate that the students had a problem in writing a coherent writing, ordering the word correctly, choosing and selecting connectors, choosing formal words, and acknowledging the mistakes. The findings are relevant the findings of previous studies, such as a study carried out by (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2020) showing that students worried about their capacity in selecting and organizing words to produce sentences and were afraid of making errors and a study conducted by Giridharan & Robson (2011) showing that many respondents were unable

to evaluate their own work and disclosed that their evaluation often did not suit that of their instructors.

The findings of this study indicated that the students still made mistakes and faced challenges in writing an academic writing. Language meaning is an indispensable part of both oral and written communication (Pasaribu, 2022), while the effectiveness of the writing is determined in part by its accuracy (Baleghizadeh & Gordani, 2012). Therefore, improving their ability is important to ensure the accuracy and readability. Interventions needed to improve the student capacity. A number of interventions are available. However, selecting an intervention must be taken thoughtfully thus it suits the student needs.

In general, this study agrees with Demirel (2017) statement that the teachers should train the student to act as their own critiques to prevent errors such as subject verb agreement errors or article use errors and to take on more responsibility for their own work and. Also, the feedback sessions and multiple revisions with teachers and peers should take place before submitting the final draft (Al-Tamimi, 2018). This study has a number of limitations, including a small number of participants. Therefore, this study suggests that further study should involve more participant to gain a richer data.

CONCLUSION

The results show that the frequent errors found in student works included the use and selection of connectors and prepositions, mechanical errors, redundance, incorrect complex sentence, sentence structure (subject and predicate agreement), and incomplete and/or inaccurate content. The main problems were difficulties in writing a coherent writing, ordering the word correctly, choosing and selecting connectors, choosing formal words, and acknowledging the mistakes. Meanwhile, the data on student knowledge showed that students had been aware of the structure of an abstract and all elements needed in an abstract. The findings imply that interventions improving the student ability in examining and revising their own work is vital, such as corrective feedback, the use of language tools, and extensive writing program containing repetitive editing. Further study is suggested to involve more participants and a deeper analysis using other linguistic frameworks to prevail more meaningful results.

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