

ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN ACADEMIC WRITING AT UNIVERSITAS PGRI KALIMANTAN

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ABSTRAK

Menulis akademik adalah keterampilan penting bagi akademisi. Keahlian ini memungkinkan mahasiswa, peneliti, dan akademisi untuk mengkomunikasikan ide, dan mendiseminasikan hasil penelitian. Oleh karena itu, penulisan akademik dimasukkan sebagai salah satu mata kuliah pada rumpun Mata Kuliah *Writing* di Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas PGRI Kalimantan. Tujuan akhir mata kuliah adalah mahasiswa dapat menulis esai ilmiah yang bersumber dari penelitian sederhana. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengetahui kelebihan dan kekurangan tulisan mahasiswa pada Mata Kuliah *Academic Writing*. Penelitian berjenis deskriptif dengan metode analisis isi konseptual. Sampel diambil dari 16 esai ilmiah mahasiswa pada Mata Kuliah *Academic Writing*. Hasil penelitian adalah bahwa mahasiswa baik dalam *ethical standards*, *structured format*, beserta *clarity* dan *precision*. Namun, mereka kurang mampu pada *critical thinking* dan *evidence-based arguments*. Disarankan agar dalam pengajaran tingkat lanjut, siswa diberikan lebih banyak aktivitas yang melibatkan *critical thinking* dan *evidence-based arguments*.

Kata Kunci: *academic writing*, kelebihan, kekurangan, berpikir kritis

ABSTRACT

Academic writing is an essential skill for academics. It enables students, researchers, and academics to communicate ideas, and disseminate research findings. Thus, academic writing is included as one of the courses of the writing cluster subjects at the English Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan. The final goal of this course is that students can write a scientific essay that comes from simple research. The study is carried out to define the strengths and weaknesses that are mostly made by students' Academic Writing Subject. This is a descriptive research, which is in conceptual content analysis method. The samples are taken from 16 students' scientific essays in Academic Writing Course. The findings are that students are good in ethical standards, structured format, as well as clarity and precision. However, they are lack of critical thinking and evidence-based arguments. It is suggested that in advanced teaching, students are provided with more activities involved critical thinking and evidence-based argument.

Keywords: *academic writing*, strength, weakness, critical thinking

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing serves as a foundation of higher education and professional scholarship, enabling students, researchers, and academics to communicate ideas, disseminate research findings, and contribute

to the body of knowledge across diverse fields. Its importance extends beyond mere communication. It embodies the principles of clarity, rigor, and ethical integrity that underpin scholarly work.

Academic writing is characterized by its formal tone, structured format, and adherence

to established conventions. It encompasses a wide range of genres, including essays, research papers, theses, dissertations, and literature reviews. Each of these forms serves a distinct purpose, from presenting original research to synthesizing existing knowledge, yet all share a common goal: to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse (Cargill & O'Connor, 2013).

Academic writing is integral to education and research for several reasons:

1. **Knowledge Dissemination:** Academic writing facilitates the dissemination of knowledge by allowing researchers to share their findings with the broader academic community and the public. Journals, conferences, and academic books serve as platforms for this exchange (Laroche & Kamm, 2014).
2. **Skill Development:** Engaging in academic writing helps students develop essential skills such as critical thinking, research proficiency, and effective communication. These skills are not only valuable in academic settings but also in professional and personal contexts (Murray, 2011).
3. **Intellectual Contribution:** Through academic writing, scholars contribute to their fields by presenting new insights, challenging existing paradigms, and proposing solutions to complex problems. This intellectual contribution drives progress and innovation (Swales & Feak, 2012).
4. **Academic Integrity:** Adherence to the principles of academic writing promotes integrity and trust within the scholarly community. Proper citation practices, transparent methodologies, and honest reporting of results are vital for maintaining the credibility of academic work (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2009).

Aligned with the thoughts earlier, academic writing is included as one of the courses of the writing cluster subjects at English Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan. The final goal of this course is that students are

able to write a scientific essay that comes from simple research. Some of the learning targets are the concept of academic writing, parts of academic essays, and mini-research for gaining data.

In fact, after the course is completed and students submit their final assignments, it is generally seen that the results of their essays are not as expected. For example, some essays do not match the format and some essays are not based on data. Not to mention grammatical errors that should not be present in scientific writing. Considering the importance of the academic writing, it is necessary to define the strengths and weaknesses that are mostly made by students' Academic Writing Subject, so the result can be used as input for the lecturer's learning targets subsequently.

The analysis will be categorized from the key components of academic writing described as follows:

1. **Structured Format:** A well-organized structure is essential for academic writing. This typically includes an introduction that outlines the research question or thesis, a body that develops the argument or analysis through logical progression, and a conclusion that summarizes the findings and their implications (Swales & Feak, 2012).
2. **Clarity and Precision:** Academic writing prioritizes clear and precise language to convey complex ideas effectively. This ensures that readers can follow arguments, understand methodologies, and appreciate conclusions without ambiguity (Murray, 2011).
3. **Critical Thinking:** Effective academic writing demonstrates critical thinking by engaging with existing literature, evaluating evidence, and presenting well-reasoned arguments. This analytical approach is fundamental to advancing knowledge and fostering intellectual growth (Graff & Birkenstein, 2014).

4. Evidence-Based Arguments:

Academic writing relies on evidence to support claims. This involves rigorous research, accurate data collection, and the appropriate use of citations to acknowledge the work of other scholars and avoid plagiarism (Day & Gastel, 2016).

5. Ethical Standards:

Ethical considerations are paramount in academic writing. This includes honesty in presenting data, integrity in acknowledging sources, and responsibility in contributing to the academic community (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2009).

Based on the course target outlined, which includes learning the concept of academic writing, understanding the parts of academic essays, and conducting mini-research to gain data, the following research gaps could be identified that there may be insufficient integration between teaching the fundamental concepts of academic writing and the application of these skills through mini-research projects. The existing curriculum separates writing instruction from research activities, which might limit students' ability to effectively translate research findings into coherent academic essays. It can be assured that students will have difficulty in developing scientific essays. Thus, it is necessary to justify the assumption as a basic argument to modify the existence of writing instruction and research subject at proper semester.

RESEARCH METHODS

This is a descriptive research, which is in conceptual content analysis method. The samples were taken from 16 students' scientific essays in Academic Writing Course. In conceptual analysis, a concept is chosen for examination and the analysis involves quantifying and counting its presence. The main goal is to examine the occurrence of

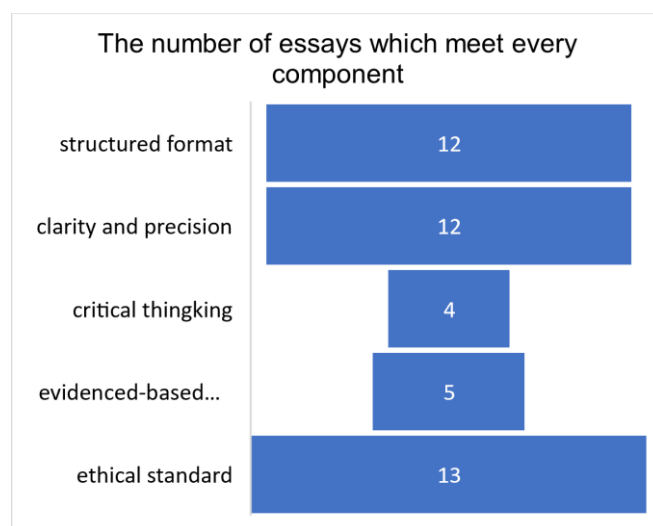
each components of academic writing (Neuendorf, 2017).

The concept which was examined was the components of academic writing. There were structured format, clarity and precision, critical thinking, evidence-based argument, and ethical standard. Every concept was coded manually every time it exists in one essay.

Then, the coding process was continued by summarizing the existence of every concept. Finally, general trends and patterns of students ability in academic writing could be identified, in terms of strengths and weaknesses (Krippendorff, 2022).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The overall performance of every component of academic essay can be viewed in the chart below.



Picture 1. The summary of the essay component existence

12 or 75% of essays complete structure format. Then, 12 or 75% of essays fulfill clarity and precision. Only 4 or 25% of essays have critical thinking. Similar to critical thinking, only 5 or 31,25% of essays have evidence-based arguments. Lastly, 13 or 81,25% of essays provide ethical standards. The percentage of essay components shows a clear picture of students' strength and weakness in academic writing.

The Strength of Student Essays

The first strength is ethical standards. The majority of essays, 13 essays (81,25%), adhere to ethical standards. By this percentage, it can be stated that students have honesty in presenting data and integrity in acknowledging sources. It also suggests that students are aware of the importance of academic integrity, such as proper citation and avoiding plagiarism.

The second strength is structured format. It is in 12 essays (75%). With 75% of essays demonstrating a structured format, students seem to have a good grasp of organizing their thoughts and presenting them in a logical sequence. This is crucial because a well-structured essay makes it easier for readers to follow the argument and understand the main points.

The third strength is clarity and precision, which is also in 12 essays (75%). This number shows that students care about using precise language and grammar in their essays. It indicates that most students can articulate their ideas clearly and concisely. This is important in academic writing, where precision helps avoid ambiguity and ensures that the argument is understood as intended.

The Weakness of Student Essays

The first weakness is critical thinking. This is the area where students seem to struggle the most. Only 4 or 25% of the essays demonstrate strong critical thinking skills. It indicates that students are not proficient in engaging with existing literature, evaluating evidence, and presenting well-reasoned arguments. This is a significant gap because critical thinking is central to academic writing. It involves analyzing information, questioning assumptions, drawing conclusions, and making informed judgments. Without it, essays may be descriptive rather than analytical, lacking depth and insight.

The second weakness is evidence-based argument. The number is quite similar, only 5 or 31.25% of the essays effectively use evidence to support arguments. It can be assumed that the students do not have enough evidence and do not rely on rigorous research

to claim a statement. With only 31.25% of essays effectively using evidence to support arguments, students may struggle with integrating research into their writing. This can lead to weak arguments that lack credibility, as the claims made are not adequately supported by data or scholarly sources.

Future Recommendation

While students are generally good at organizing their essays and maintaining clarity, they need more support in developing critical thinking and effectively using evidence to back up their arguments. Essays written may fail to meet higher-level academic standards, resulting in lower grades and reduced confidence in writing. The results show similar research findings to the one which was done by Nikoulina (2020). Her research indicates that graduate business program students have sufficient general writing skills, but struggle when applying these to academic writing for a specific discipline. Results also show that students have significant deficiencies when it comes to research skills.

The lack of critical thinking and effective use of evidence can also significantly impact students' academic success in the future. As students progress in their academic careers, the demands for critical thinking and evidence-based argumentation will increase. If these skills are not developed early, students may find it challenging to succeed in more advanced academic courses or research projects.

Based on the analysis, the focus in teaching efforts should be given more on enhancing critical thinking and the use of evidence in writing. The tasks or activities that require students to critically analyze sources and construct well-supported arguments are preferable. Examples of those activities:

1. Introduce workshops that focus on developing critical thinking skills. These can include activities like analysing case studies, engaging in debates, and practicing argument construction.

2. Encourage students to question assumptions, explore alternatives, and consider different perspectives in their writing. This can be done through guided questioning in class or as part of writing assignments.
3. Provide students with exercises that require them to find, evaluate, and integrate evidence from academic sources into their essays. This can include annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, and research-based assignments. Research by Swales & Feak (2020) and Hyland (2023) has focused on the challenges faced by non-native English speakers in academic writing. These studies emphasize the need for targeted pedagogical approaches that address specific linguistic challenges and provide scaffolding for learning academic vocabulary and conventions.
4. Organize peer review sessions where students critique each other's work, focusing on the use of evidence and the strength of arguments. This not only helps the writer but also develops critical thinking in the reviewer. Recent studies, such as those by Tangkiengsirisin (2021) and others, have explored collaborative writing interventions and their effectiveness in improving academic writing skills. These studies found that collaborative writing activities, where students work together on writing tasks, can enhance understanding of academic writing conventions and foster critical thinking skills.
5. Encourage students to reflect on their own learning and progress. This can be done through self-assessment or reflective writing assignments where they evaluate their development in critical thinking and use of evidence. They can use some tools for writing, such as Grammarly, ProWritingAid, and AI-based tools like ChatGPT. Research indicates that these tools significantly enhance students' writing by providing real-time feedback on grammar, style, and structure (Calma et al., 2022; Baskara & Mukarto, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Among the key components of academic writing, students are good in ethical standards, structured format, as well as clarity and precision. On the other hand, they are lack of critical thinking and evidence-based argument. In the future, it is suggested that more activities demanding critical thinking should be applied to strengthen these skills. This will not only improve their current performance but also prepare them for future academic challenges.

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