The Challenges Of Writing: English Education Students At STAI Miftahul Ulum Tanjungpinang

Eka Mayasari [1], Joko Iswanto [2]
[1,2] English Education Department, IAI Miftahul Ulum Tanjungpinang, Indonesia
e-mail: eka.maya.sari28@gmail.com[1], iswantojoko21@gmail.com[2]

Address: Jl. Kepodang IV No.KM.11, Batu IX, Tanjungpinang Timur, Tanjung Pinang City, Riau Islands
Corresponding Author: eka.maya.sari28@gmail.com

Abstract: This research aims to identify the problems faced by English education students at STAI Miftahul Ulum in writing courses. The background of this research is based on the importance of writing skills in the academic world and the challenges faced by students in mastering linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and learning environment aspects. This research uses a qualitative approach with the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and observation methods. The research subjects were second, fourth, and sixth-semester students in the 2023 academic year who had taken Basic Writing, Editing & Revising Erroneous Text, and Academic Writing courses. The results showed that the main problems lie in grammatical errors and the organization of ideas related to linguistic aspects. Cognitively, students have difficulty developing ideas and drawing logical conclusions. Psychologically, low motivation and self-confidence exacerbate students' writing abilities. Meanwhile, an unsupportive learning environment, such as limited access to reading sources and minimal guidance from lecturers, becomes a significant external constraint. The conclusion of the study indicates that the appropriate solution involves intensive guidance in grammar, increased opportunities for writing practice, and the creation of an interactive learning environment. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective and structured writing learning strategies.

Keywords: challenges, writing, Writing skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the primary language skills that is crucial in the academic world. According to (Mayasari, 2018) writing is not merely transferring ideas into written form, but also a process of systematic thinking to produce meaning that can be understood by the reader. This skill encompasses complex aspects, such as organizing ideas, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of writing. However, at the university level, the writing learning process often faces various challenges, which ultimately affect the quality of students' written work.

Writing skills are essential in an academic context, especially for producing scholarly works such as research papers, essays, and research proposals. Students are expected to be able to think critically, develop coherent arguments, and present ideas in a systematic and structured manner. However, the reality in the field shows that many students still face difficulties in writing, particularly in terms of paragraph organization, grammar usage, and appropriate word choice.

Based on observations conducted in April 2023 on students of the English Language Teaching Study Program at STAI Miftahul Ulum Tanjungpinang, several

problems were found that hinder the development of their writing skills. The first problem is that students have difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences, as well as problems in organizing ideas logically. In addition, there was also a problem of difficulty in analyzing information and drawing clear conclusions. Even in the idea development stage, many students have difficulty developing ideas in depth and originality.

These problems not only impact the quality of students' writing but also their motivation to write. Low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and minimal writing practice are psychological factors that further exacerbate the situation. Additionally, limited access to relevant reading materials and insufficient guidance from lecturers are external factors that also affect students' writing skills.

As the academic demands in higher education continue to rise, writing skills have become a key factor for students to be able to complete academic tasks well. Good writing skills not only reflect a student's intellectual ability but also their ability to think critically and construct logical arguments. Therefore, this study aims to identify the problems faced by students in writing courses in the English Language Education Study Program at STAI Miftahul Ulum Tanjungpinang, and to formulate appropriate solutions to overcome these problems.

This research is essential considering that its results can make a significant contribution to the development of writing teaching methods in higher education. By understanding the challenges faced by students, lecturers in writing courses are expected to be able to design more effective learning strategies that are suitable for students' needs. In addition, the results of this research are also expected to be a reference for the improvement of the curriculum and learning materials that better support the holistic development of students' writing skills.

Based on the background of the problem presented above, the research problem to be discussed in this study is what are the problems faced by English Education students in writing courses at STAI Miftahul Ulum?

Essence of Writing

According to (Rofi'uddin and Zuhdi, 1999), writing is a skill of pouring out thoughts, ideas, opinions about something, responses to a statement, or expressing feelings using written language. (Pudjiono, 2007) defines writing as a skill in pouring out an idea, concept, or image that exists in a person's mind and transforming it into a written work that can be read and easily understood by others. (Tarigan, 2008) suggests that

writing is the process of transferring or depicting graphic symbols that represent a language understood by one person, so that others can read these graphic symbols if they understand the language and the graphics. In essence, writing is a skill that empowers individuals to communicate and transmit ideas in written form.

In general, the purpose of writing is to inform, persuade, express oneself, and entertain. According to (Abidin, 2009), the objectives of writing are to engage readers in critical thinking, to make readers aware of the information presented, to encourage readers to form opinions, to foster understanding, to persuade readers to accept the arguments presented, and to delight readers by appreciating the values conveyed, such as truth, religion, education, social values, morals, humanity, and aesthetics.

Good writing has its own unique characteristics. (Rosidi, 2009) states that good writing has the following characteristics: a) the title corresponds to the content, b) the correct use of spelling and punctuation, c) accuracy in sentence structure, and d) unity, coherence, and completeness in each paragraph. Good writing has its own unique characteristics. Different from (Enre, 1988) who stated that good writing has the following characteristics: a) meaningful, b) clear, c) cohesive and coherent, d) economical, and e) follows grammatical rules. Good writing is writing that is able to express something that has meaning for someone and provides evidence for what is said in the writing. The meaningfulness of writing is supported by the clarity of the writing. Writing can be called clear if the reader can read at a steady pace and grasp the meaning in the writing. In addition to being meaningful and clear, good writing is cohesive and coherent.

According to Iskandar (Wassid, 2008), writing ability is a development of reading ability. Writing ability is acquired after reading skills have been mastered. Writing ability relies more on active and productive language skills. Writing skills can be used to express thoughts or feelings. A language user has the opportunity to organize and prepare themselves in writing. Messages that need to be conveyed can be carefully selected and systematically arranged for easy understanding.

According to (Keraf, 1989), a person's writing ability can be influenced by several factors, namely: (1) mastery of language knowledge, which includes active vocabulary mastery, grammatical mastery, and mastery of language style, (2) having good reasoning skills, and (3) having a good and solid understanding of the subject matter. If a person masters these three factors, it will be easier for them to write well. (Akhadiah, 1997) states that there are several factors that cause low writing ability in

students, such as low knowledge of language and grammar, a limited number of vocabularies, low interest in learning to write, lack of practice, and low reasoning ability of students.

In this research, there are three courses related to writing lectures: Basic Writing, Editing & Revising Erroneous Text, and Academic Writing. The objective of the Basic Writing course is to enhance students' ability in writing texts. This course will equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to produce quality written work. Meanwhile, the purpose of the Editing & Revising Erroneous Text course is to improve students' ability in editing and revising texts. This course will equip students with the knowledge and skills required to produce high-quality texts. While the Academic Writing course aims to equip students with the theory and practice of writing academic papers in English. The learning materials include types of academic writing, techniques for developing writing, using references, summarizing, paraphrasing, and combining information from various sources.

2. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth description of the difficulties faced by students in writing. The research subjects are second, fourth, and sixth-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at STAI Miftahul 'Ulum Tanjungpinang who have taken the courses Basic Writing, Editing and Revising Erroneous Text, and Academic Writing in the 2023 academic year. The primary instrument in this research is a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to delve deeper into students' experiences and perspectives regarding their writing difficulties. In addition to FGDs, this study also uses documentation techniques as supporting data.

This research was conducted from May to July 2023 at STAI Miftahul 'Ulum Tanjungpinang. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted involving students from various semesters to obtain a comprehensive overview. Each FGD session lasted for 90 minutes with a prepared discussion guide. The discussions were recorded and transcribed for subsequent thematic analysis. Data analysis involved transcription, initial coding, theme organization, and data triangulation with observation and documentation results. FGD participants were selected purposively and had provided informed consent. The confidentiality of participant identities is guaranteed.

Blueprint of Questions for Focus Group Discussion: Problems of English Education Students at STAI Miftahul Ulum in Writing Lectures

Component	Sub-Component	Research Question
Linguistic Problems	-Sentence structure -Grammar - Vocabulary	To identify linguistic issues in students' academic writing
Cognitive Problems	- Idea planning - Coherence and cohesion	To explore students' difficulties in developing ideas and structuring their writing
Psychological Problems	- Self-confidence - Motivation - Anxiety	To understand the psychological impact on the writing process
Influence of Learning Environment	- Guidance from lecturers - Access to reading materials	To determine the influence of the learning environment on writing ability
Learning Strategies	- Teaching methods - Writing practice	To identify effective learning strategies

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Writing courses, such as Basic Writing, Editing & Revising Erroneous Text, and Academic Writing, are essential foundations in developing the competencies of English Education students. These three courses are designed to equip students with comprehensive writing skills, from the basics of writing to more complex academic writing. However, in practice, many students face various obstacles in mastering these writing skills.

Problems of English Education Students at STAI Miftahul Ulum in Writing Courses Linguistic aspects

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that English Education students at STAI Miftahul 'Ulum face various obstacles in writing courses, which can be categorized into four main aspects: linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and learning environment.

Based on the FGD data, it was found that students often face difficulties with English sentence structure and grammar, which aligns with (Selinker's, 1972) interlanguage theory. Negative transfer from Indonesian to English results in recurring grammatical and structural errors. The most common errors found in the documentation data were inconsistencies in tense usage. Within a single paragraph, students mixed the

use of present tense and past tense without clear justification. For example, they wrote *"The study finds that..."* followed by *"It was argued that...",* disregarding temporal coherence in their writing.

Another linguistic factor identified from the FGD is a lack of creativity and in-depth knowledge of the topics they write about. This exacerbates students' difficulties in producing grammatically correct writing, and hinders their ability to construct coherent paragraphs.

Problems with cohesion in student writing were also found in the documentary data analysis. The inappropriate use of inter-sentence connectors caused the ideas in the essays to feel disconnected. For example, a student wrote, 'The first reason is that students need more practice. Teachers should provide feedback,' without using a connective word like 'Additionally' or 'Therefore' to strengthen the logic between ideas. This indicates a lack of understanding of the importance of cohesion in academic writing.

In addition, students often fail to develop their ideas in depth. Within paragraphs, they frequently present only general statements such as "Technology improves education" without providing further evidence or analysis of how technology plays a role in enhancing education. This indicates that students struggle to develop strong and logical arguments, aligning with the findings from the FGD that emphasized students' challenges in formulating accurate conclusions.

The unclear structure of paragraphs is also a problem. Documentation data shows that students often shift topics within a single paragraph without clear transitions, such as when they start by discussing academic writing and then suddenly switch to the importance of speaking English without a strong logical connection. This supports the results of the FGD that show students have difficulty in constructing coherent paragraphs and building a structured argument.

Cognitive Aspect

The difficulties experienced by students in constructing well-written texts are influenced by cognitive factors, as expressed by (Adams & Simmons, 2019). The writing process involves a complex series of cognitive activities, from planning to revision. In this context, students often face challenges, especially at the planning stage, where they must organize their ideas into a logical and coherent structure.

A clear example of this difficulty can be seen in Student A (fourth semester, English Education program) in the Academic Writing course. The topic of their writing

was "The Role of Social Media in Language Learning." During the planning stage, Student A had trouble determining the main focus of the topic. Although they were able to gather information from various sources, they struggled to select which information was relevant to developing the main argument. As a result, the writing produced was incoherent and jumped between unrelated ideas.

Furthermore, in developing their ideas, Student A got stuck on repeating the same idea, for instance, repeatedly defining social media without linking it to specific impacts on language learning. This difficulty indicates a lack of critical thinking and in-depth analysis skills, which should be part of the writing process.

In the analysis and synthesis of information, Student A struggled with analyzing and comparing research findings. They tended to quote data without synthesizing or presenting critical arguments about the role of social media. This indicates that they have not yet mastered the higher-order thinking skills required to integrate information logically and critically.

Finally, in the conclusion section, Student A failed to formulate a conclusion based on the arguments presented. They merely restated a few points without providing any critical thinking or concrete solutions regarding the use of social media in language learning.

This condition indicates that writing difficulties are not merely confined to linguistic aspects but also involve complex higher-order thinking processes. Factors such as being easily distracted and having difficulty concentrating further impede the writing process, posing additional challenges for students in constructing well-structured and effective writing.

Psychological aspects

In the classroom, there was a discussion group consisting of students E and F. Student E felt anxious and hesitant when asked to present ideas in front of the class. This uncertainty led to a loss of self-confidence, preventing him from daring to contribute to the discussion. On the other hand, Student F, who previously had high motivation, began to lose enthusiasm when he saw his classmates were not actively participating. As a result, both of them struggled to produce quality writing due to a lack of constructive idea exchange.

This is in line with the findings of the FGD, (Ancona, 2002), which emphasized the importance of psychological dynamics in understanding individual development. In

the context of academic writing, this dynamic is reflected in the change of students' attitudes and self-confidence towards their writing abilities. Additionally, (Addis, 2009) also highlighted the issue of interpersonal communication that can impact writing motivation. Students often feel uncertain about their own writing abilities, leading to a fear of negative evaluation of their writing. Lack of interest or understanding of the importance of writing also acts as a barrier.

Therefore, a combination of psychological factors such as low self-confidence, anxiety, and lack of motivation can significantly hinder students from producing high-quality writing.

Learning environment aspects

Vygotsky, through his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), emphasized the significance of social environments in the learning process. These environments encompass interactions between students and instructors, peers, and other learning resources. According to Taylor (1993), others are integral to the learning environment, where knowledge is initially acquired through social interaction before being internalized individually. However, in the context of academic writing, many students face obstacles in reaching their full potential. A lack of constructive guidance and feedback from instructors, as well as an excessive workload, limits students from achieving their Zone of Proximal Development. Consequently, their writing abilities do not develop optimally. To address this, a supportive learning environment needs to be created where students can interact with more competent individuals, allowing them to learn and develop effectively.

Solutions to the Problems of English Education Students at STAI Miftahul Ulum in Writing Courses

The problems of English Education students in writing, especially in linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and learning environment aspects, require an integrated solution. To overcome linguistic obstacles, it is important for students to receive intensive training focused on English sentence structure and grammar. A contrastive analysis approach can help students realize the differences between Indonesian and English, thus reducing negative transfer. In addition, the use of learning aids, such as grammar checker applications or digital writing guides, can accelerate the mastery of grammar.

From a cognitive perspective, writing instruction should be designed to train students in critical thinking and writing planning. The instructor's scaffolding model can break down the writing process into smaller, more manageable steps such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising. The use of project-based methods, where students must complete essays or research with the support of study groups, will enrich the process of analysis and argumentation.

Psychologically, emotional and motivational support is also needed. Students need to build their self-confidence through positive and constructive feedback. Lecturers can integrate self-reflection practices into writing instruction, where students identify their strengths and weaknesses, followed by improvement planning. A competitive yet supportive learning environment, where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process, will also help alleviate anxiety and increase students' motivation to keep practicing.

Finally, an interactive learning environment is crucial. Lecturers need to provide more opportunities for individual consultations and offer writing sessions that focus on practice, providing concrete examples and intensive drills. Peer review can also be an effective method to improve students' writing skills, as it allows them to learn from constructive criticism from their peers. This collaborative environment will facilitate the comprehensive development of students' writing abilities.

4. CONCLUSION

English Language Education students at STAI Miftahul 'Ulum encounter various obstacles in their writing courses, encompassing linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and environmental factors. Linguistically, negative transfer from Indonesian to English is a primary cause of recurrent grammatical errors. Cognitively, students struggle with planning their writing and organizing ideas logically, which hinders the quality of their work. Psychologically, low self-esteem and anxiety exacerbate their writing difficulties. Meanwhile, from an environmental perspective, the limited guidance and constructive feedback available make it challenging for students to reach their full potential.

The proposed solutions encompass an integrated approach involving intensive grammar training through contrastive analysis, the use of digital tools, and the implementation of learning strategies that promote critical thinking and writing planning. Psychological support in the form of positive feedback and self-reflection is necessary to build students' confidence. Additionally, creating an interactive and collaborative

learning environment, including through peer review, will support the comprehensive development of writing skills.

REFERENCE

Abdussamad, Z. (2021). Metode penelitian kualitatif. Syakir Media Press.

Abidin, Y. (2009). Guru dan pembelajaran bermutu. Rizki Press.

Berutu, A. G. (2017). Metodologi penelitian Noeng Muhajir. ResearchGate, 1. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.20452.73607

Brown, H. D. (2014). Principles of language learning and teaching: A course in second language acquisition. Allyn & Bacon.

Byrne, D. (1991). Teaching writing skills. Longman.

DeVault, S. J. T. R. B., & Marjorie L. (2016). Introduction to qualitative research methods.

Gie, T. L. (2002). Terampil mengarang. Balai Pustaka.

Haryadi, & Zamzami. (1996). Peningkatan keterampilan berbahasa Indonesia. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.

Hennink, M. M. (2014). Focus group discussions. Oxford University Press.

Herdi, H. (2000). An analysis on factors influencing the students'. Journal of Lancang Kuning, 14(2), 19–22.

Ibrahim, M. (2015). Panduan penelitian beserta contoh proposal kualitatif. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Lenovo/Downloads/Metodologi_Penelitian_Kualitatif.pdf

Mayasari, E. (2018). Exposure Journal 117. Exposure Journal 117, 7(2), 117–126.

Pudjiono, S. (2007). Konsep dasar menulis, modul pendidikan FBS UNY. Staff Site UNY.

Rofi'uddin, A., & Zuhdi, D. (1999). Pendidikan bahasa dan sastra Indonesia di kelas tinggi. Dirjen Dikti Depdikbud.

Sodik, S. S. M. A. (2015). Dasar metodologi penelitian. Literasi Media Publishing.

Tarigan, H. G. (2008). Menulis sebagai suatu keterampilan berbahasa. Angkasa.