STRATEGIES FASHIONED BY EFL STUDENTS IN ENDURING ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract
Academic writing papers in Indonesia require students to be able to write academically correct both in college assignments, essays, and journal articles. It has long been a serious discussion, especially in universities. Reputable journals always wait for the best and qualified articles (Wekke, 2015). This research is a qualitative descriptive design employing a case study model. There were 30 respondents involved in this study. They are all undergraduate students at Syiah Kuala University, Ar-Raniri State Islamic University, and Serambi Mekkah University. The data collection was done by distributing a set of questionnaire to the respondents. Later, the data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics. The result shows that students utilize several strategies in writing academically. First, they frequently discuss the tasks with their colleagues, this is considered important because peer helps a lot in the learning process, including in writing. Second, in terms of outline organization of ideas, students usually make an outline or rough draft before writing. Later, regarding the organizational revision of content and writing coherence, the students rarely do this because the students’ awareness in re-examining writing after the first writing was still very lacking. The students focus less on organization and ideas, only grammar.

Keywords: Academic writing, students’ strategies, EFL students.

INTRODUCTION
Globalization has given a large impact and influenced the development and growth of languages. It acts as a means of supporting the growth and development of science, culture, and technology. In academic circles such as schools and colleges, teachers and lecturers are required to teach academic writing. However, errors in using English as a foreign language still often occur because of various variables, such as the influence of mother tongue, lack of understanding of language use, and imperfection in language teaching (Saddhono, 2012). The Indonesian government strongly encourages all universities in the country to increase scientific publications in globally reputable international journals (Darmalaksana, 2017). Academic writing in Indonesia, the country where English is seen as a foreign language, requires students to be able to write academically correctly in college assignments, essays, and journal articles.

Accordingly, academic writing papers has long been a serious discussion, especially in universities. Reputable journals always wait for the articles received to be good quality articles (Wekke, 2015). Writing academic papers aimed at communicating creative and innovative works and developing science and technology to the wider community. Concerning teaching materials, according to Al Badi (2015), academic writing is considered as an integral part of the process of learning English. Understanding the difficulties and academic writing needs of students can give a clear description of what is the best and most effective textbooks to be applied for students in learning.

It cannot be denied that writing academically is not something easy. A writer must pay attention to the contents of his/her writing so that good and interesting writing content can be accepted academically. The obstacles that are often faced by students as stated by David (2019) that lead most students to do plagiarism, make errors in structure and grammar writing, face difficulty in choosing words, and have poorly planned composition. According to David (2019), in academic writing, plagiarizing or stealing other people’s writing and claiming it as our writing without including the source of the writing is a fatal mistake.
Besides, according to her, a writer must pay attention to the correct grammar and punctuation in his/her academic writing. Next, to avoid errors in grammar or punctuation, a writer can correct them repeatedly or can ask for help from others before the article is published to the public. And most importantly, David (2019) further urged that there are often found writings that are not interrelated between introductions, contents, and conclusions. To solve this problem, good planning before writing process must be done to produce good and interesting writing.

Unfortunately, in most cases, the students’ final papers are not as good as expected (Al Murshidi, 2014). That is why the majority of teachers and lecturers face difficulties in the process of teaching writing skills. The research on this topic has been carried out by many researchers. First, Belkhir and Benyelles (2017) in their paper entitled “Identifying EFL Learners Essay Writing Difficulties and Sources”, revealed that students meet difficulties in coherence and cohesion due to the lack of reading, first language transfer and low of writing practice. Second, Arianti and Fitriana (2017) in their writing on “EFL Students’ Difficulties and Needs in Essay Writing” show that students have major difficulties in grammatical, cohesion and coherence terms. Moreover, minor aspects have also been revealed regarding students’ writing, namely paragraph organization, diction, and misspelling vocabulary. Lastly, Mallia (2017) in her article about “Strategies for Developing English Academic Writing Skills” that there are many important elements that a writer must do before he/she starts writing. They include the structure of a paragraph or writing, a writing component, and so on. Other problems discussed in her paper are aspects of a language such as the level of formality, continuity in writing, plagiarism, and others. Considering its complexity in accomplishing writing task, the students are expected to be more intense guidance from the lecturer, such as continuous consultation regarding the lecturer’s feedback in their essay draft.

Based on the above explanation, it is considered that the strategies employed by students are important to be investigated. Therefore, this paper wants to look at students’ strategies and attitudes in facing academic writing assignments. Shortly, this current study is trying to figure out the answer to the following question: What are university students’ strategies and attitudes in coping with academic writing?

METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive design employing a case study model. The case study allows the researchers to find out the answers to the formulated problems by doing close observation but without intervening the variables (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). In this study, the researchers were trying to see the strategies used by the students as well as their attitudes toward academic writing without using any intervening instruments. There were 30 respondents involved in this study. They are all undergraduate students at Syiah Kuala University, Ar Raniri State Islamic University, and Serambi Mekkah University.

The data collection was carried out by asking the respondents to answer a questionnaire set. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes a key instrument by collecting data through examining documents, observing behavior through documents (including questionnaires), or interviewing participants (Creswell, 2011). The questionnaires were separated into 3: section one is about the respondent’s background, section two is about the students’ attitudes and strategies in dealing with writing assignments, and section three is about and the difficulties faced by students during the academic writing process in English and referrals commonly used by students to support their writing. The respondents should answer the questionnaire in the Likert scale with 5 (always), 4 (usually), 3 (sometimes), 2 (rarely) and 1 (never). The questionnaire was distributed on 11-17 July 2019.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of students’ attitudes and behavior of students in dealing with English writing assignments is displayed on several separate figures. Figure 1 depicts student writing preparation, Figure 2 illustrates the writing organization and consulting to their lecturer, Figure 3 shows students’ habitual activity after writing the first draft, Figure 4 shows the students’ focus in writing and proofreading, and Figure 5 illustrates students’ perceptions of writing assignments and kinds of literature they prefer to use.
Figure 1. Students’ writing preparation.

Figure 1 illustrates that some respondents, with a total of 16 (53%) “always” discussed the writing ideas they would write with friends. Meanwhile, 6 respondents (20%) chose “rarely”, 5 respondents (17%) “often” did it, and only 3 people (10%) answered “usually”. In addition, activities prior to writing, such as brainstorming ideas, making outlines or drafts show the trend that the respondents answered the most “usually” 11 people (37%), 8 people (27%) answered “often”, 7 people (23%) answered “Always”, 2 persons (7%) answered “rarely” and 2 persons (7%) answered “sometimes”. Concerning major preparation that they do is discussing their ideas with their friends. As suggested by King (2019) that different points of view can enhance and increase the understanding of a writer when conducting direct discussions with friends who have different perspectives in positive situations and aim to give each other bright ideas.

Figure 2. Writing organization and consultation.

In the next variable, as shown in figure 2, in terms of revision on organizational of content and coherence after the first writing activity, 14 people (47%) answered “usually”, 8 people (27%) answered “often”, 4 people (13 %) answered “always”, and 4 people (13%) answered “rarely”. The question about writing consultation to the lecturer to gain more detail information and to ask for unclear points, the highest number was only 11 respondents (37%) who “often” did it, 8 people (27%) answered “usually”, 5 people (17%) answered “always”, 4 people (13%) answered “rarely” and only 2 persons (7%) answered
“sometimes”. McCarthy (1991) urges that revising organizational of content and coherence in the beginning process of writing is essential because information must unfold in a structured form to achieve coherence.

Figure 3. Writing revisions.

Figure 3 shows the response from students to the tendency of students to revise the results of their writing to see content and ideas that are coherent. Most respondents, 13 people (43%) answered “usually”, the rest “often” was chosen by 7 people (23%), “always” was chosen by 5 people (17%) and “sometimes” was chosen by only 2 persons (7%). Furthermore, in editing language items such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, “often” answers were mostly chosen by 12 respondents (40%), “usually” by 8 people (27%), “always” chosen by 6 people. (20%), while the response to “rarely” and “sometimes” is the same as having 2 voters with a percentage of each (7%). Revising after the writing process is accomplished is also important as suggested by Zamel (1985) that many writers lose direction when writing because of the emergence of new ideas in the writing process so that the authors make revisions until the authors feel satisfied with the results of their writing.

Figure 4. Students’ writing focus and proofreading.

In responding to questionnaires about students’ attention to their writing, in general whether they pay more attention to language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) than to the content (e.g. ideas,
organization), 9 respondents (30%) chose “always”, 8 respondents (27%) chose “often”, 7 respondents (23%) chose “usually”, meanwhile the responses “rarely” and “sometimes” each got the same amount of 3 voters (10%). However, students were also asked about whether they give the same attention to both the language (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) and the content (e.g. ideas, organization). Although “always” got 6 voters (20%), “often” and “usually” each got 9 voters (30%) and “rarely” was only chosen by 2 respondents (7%). To get suggestions from friends, students can also proofread so that they get feedback about things that need to be improved. The highest percentage was obtained “usually” with 10 respondents (33%), “often” chosen by 8 people (27%), 6 respondents (20%) chose “always”, 4 respondents (13%) chose “rarely”, and only 2 respondents (7%) chose “sometimes”. Proofreading is a vital part of academic writing because by doing it, a writer may identify areas that could be supported by more facts or better arguments. As stated by Clarke (2019), “Proofreading a paper before you turn it in can mean the difference between an unacceptable essay and one that will be praised and rewarded with an excellent grade.” However, she also added that most students skip this crucial step when writing.

![Figure 5. Students’ perception of writing English.](image)

Based on the results of the questionnaire that has been distributed and as seen in figure 5, it is clear that 20 respondents (68%) feel that English writing assignments are difficult. Those who feel that this is easy, only 5 respondents (16%) and with the same number, only 5 people (16%) feel that English writing assignments neither difficult nor easy.

![Figure 6. Students’ preference in using references.](image)
Figure 6 illustrates that students tend to use journals, books, and websites as a modification of their writing references, as seen in the picture that 22 respondents (73%) chose this option. The rest, only 8 people chose to use the books they got both in the library and in the bookstores.

From the results described above, the tendency of students to face English writing assignments based on frequency “always”, “usually”, “often”, “sometimes” and “rarely” shows the attitude of students in composing English writing assignments. In the first variable, it was seen that students tended to discuss the tasks they received in the form of essays, papers, and articles with their friends. As said by one student at the University of Syiah Kuala, SH said:

“I always share ideas with friends to gain more information about the topics that I would like to show but to show the rough draft or outline, I prefer not.”

In terms of outline organization of ideas, students usually make an outline or rough draft before writing, even many of them often do it. According to CN, an undergraduate student of UIN Ar-Raniry stated that if the writing is only a free essay, she does not brainstorm or design outlines, but if it is written as an article, she will think the ideas carefully and make outlines even find learning resources to support her draft.

In line with this idea, David (2019) stated that sometimes poor planning before writing activities produces writing that is unclear and not coherence even though the author has a lot of relevant data and information about his writing, but if it does not have a good organization, then the paper produced is not in accordance with the expected. David (2019) also claimed that writers should be aware of the different parts of the article. The introduction, body, and conclusion should be defined and linked with each other.

Furthermore, in terms of revision on organizational of content and writing coherence, only 13% of respondents “always” did it, meaning that students’ awareness in re-examining writing after the first writing was still very lacking. Based on the results of interviews with Y, a student of Serambi Mekkah University, she said that re-examinations to ensure coherence and grammar, spelling, and punctuation were rarely done because sometimes she has a lot of tasks and papers to finish so she does not have enough time to revise her writing. She also said that after writing, she asks her friend to read her work, so the revision activities were carried out with friends.

According to Al Badi (2015), writers usually aim to produce writings that have a well-chosen vocabulary, paragraphs that are related logically and coherently to produce ideas that are clearly expressed. Based on the results of his research, students’ responses revealed that only a few students considered that coherence and cohesion played an important role in academic writing, although doing so was not easy. They also often consult their writing to the lecturer, except to clarify the task requested in the classroom. As “SH”, a student of Syiah Kuala University said that she was reluctant to contact the lecturer regarding the writing she is working on. Related to this, Can (2009) stated that sometimes feedback received by students after asking lecturers tends to make students less confident in continuing their writing.

However, in other variables that ask about in which part do they pay more attention (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) or to the content (e.g. ideas, organization), only nine students feel this is the thing important with the answer “always”. The same attention to language items (e.g. spelling, grammar, vocabulary) and the content (e.g. ideas, organization) also has a less satisfactory response in the part where students tend to choose “often” or “usually”. This supports the previous question that they are more focused on grammar. As stated by a student with initials “SH”, if the grammar is still not good, it is feared that the ideas will not be well conveyed, she said:

“If the content is good, but grammar is still wrong, in my opinion, the writing produced is still not maximal”.

This means that not all students always seek feedback from friends through proofreading activities as an effort to improve the results of writing.

A student with initials Y said:

“I like to discuss the results of my writing to friends to get feedback and suggestions about the ideas I have written to see the mistakes that I might make.”

However, unlike the view of “SH”, she said:
“I did not ask friends directly to proofreading the results of my writing unless my friend asks to see the results of my writing and they try to provide additional ideas.”

In line with this, Al Badi (2015) in his research results stated, that the majority of the respondents also claimed that they always proofread their work and about one-third of them asking other students to edit their writing.

The last part that becomes the variable in this study is the students’ perspective in facing English writing assignments. Student perspectives on English assignments writing assignments are difficult as the percentage that has been shown in the results section. This as stated by “SH” that writing is a habit that must be done continuously so that the ability is more honed. She added:

“If I do not write for a long time, then to start writing again it will be difficult to be able to refocus on the purpose of writing.”

In this case, Al Badi (2015) stated that many students lack background information about the issues they will be composing. According to him, many students feel less confident because students feel they are not experts in the field as their chosen authors as a reference. Becker (1986, cited in Murry & Moore, 2006) to overcome such problem, students should be advised and to never underestimate their aptitudes for skillfully expressing their views.

Students themselves, with technological support and easy access to the internet, prefer to modify their reading and reference sources from credible journals, books or websites. Students with the initials CN said that she is more likely to look for references from various journals because they are always updated. For her, library access is currently quite good, but the printed books are still not updated enough. Meanwhile, Y students prefer to modify their references from books, journals, and trusted websites. As written by anonymous on the CQUniversity library website (2018), various options are available for students to choose the right source for their research, including books, articles, and websites. Different sources can offer various types of information. The book itself cannot always be the best source for the topic being written. Instead, articles are found in many scientific journals through “peer-reviewed” processes. In other words, articles are examined by academics and other experts so the information is reliable. Besides containing scientific information, journal articles can include reports and research review update and specific information under the topic of students’ writing. Literature used by students can be sourced from many places and each has advantages and disadvantages. The most important is the students’ motivation to read a lot of learning sources.

CONCLUSION
From the result, it can be concluded that students fashion several strategies in writing academically. First, they frequently discuss the tasks with their colleagues, this is considered important because peer helps a lot in the learning process, including in writing. Second, in terms of outline organization of ideas, students usually make an outline or rough draft before writing. Later, regarding the organizational revision of content and writing coherence, the students rarely do this because the students’ awareness in re-examining writing after the first writing was still very lacking. The students focus less on organization and ideas, only grammar. The implication that is provided through this study is that students who are composing academic writing need various strategies to success so that for those who are not employing them yet had better start using them.

REFERENCES
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