

PERSPECTIVES IN ACADEMIC WRITING: INSIGHTS FROM ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perspectives of students in Islamic higher education institutions on academic writing, focusing on English Education programs at Institut Agama Islam Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi (IAIDA) and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo (UNUJA). Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with sixty senior students. The findings highlight the critical importance of English proficiency for academic success, though students face challenges with grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. AI tools like Google Translate and Grammarly are widely used to aid writing, though they fall short in generating original content. Writing and research methodology courses are deemed essential, but students call for more effective instruction and supervision. The need for clear, consistent academic writing regulations is emphasized, as current ambiguities hinder adherence to standards. Students view academic writing as crucial for both academic completion and career preparation, underscoring the broader educational significance of writing skills. The study concludes that enhanced support and targeted interventions are necessary to improve academic writing proficiency and critical thinking among students in these institutions.

Keywords: Academic writing; Higher education; Student perspectives

Submitted	Reviewed	Revised	Published
08 July 2024	10 July 2024	20 July 2024	30 July 2024

Introduction

In the realm of English language education, understanding students' perspectives on academic writing is crucial for curriculum development and effective teaching strategies (Sajjad et al., 2021). This study delves into the specific context of students enrolled in the English Language Teaching program at Islamic

higher education institutions, aiming to illuminate their views on the importance of academic writing skills and the challenges they face in this regard (Hana & Suwarti, 2020).

While academic writing is universally recognized as a fundamental skill, students' perceptions of its significance and the hurdles they encounter in mastering it vary across different educational contexts (Al-Khairy, 2013). Understanding these perspectives is essential for tailoring instructional approaches to meet students' needs effectively (Ramzan et al., 2023).

Previous research has underscored the multifaceted nature of challenges students encounter in academic writing, ranging from linguistic barriers to motivational factors (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010; Akhtar, 2020). However, limited scholarly attention has been directed towards exploring students' viewpoints on academic writing within the specific context of Islamic higher education institutions (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023).

This research holds significance as it seeks to shed light on students' perspectives regarding academic writing within the English Education program. By understanding their attitudes, motivations, and perceived challenges, educators can devise more targeted interventions to enhance students' academic writing proficiency (Belhabib, 2015; Atmojo, 2022).

Based on the literature review, it is hypothesized that students enrolled in the English Education program at Islamic higher education institutions may hold unique perspectives on academic writing, influenced by their cultural and educational backgrounds (Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2015; Arneback & Fadli, 2023). These perspectives are likely to inform their attitudes towards the importance of academic writing and their perceived challenges in developing this skill (Ramzan et al., 2023)

This study aims to explore students' perspectives on academic writing within the context of the English Education program. By focusing solely on students' viewpoints, this research distinguishes itself from previous studies that have primarily examined challenges and instructional strategies (Krause, 2001; Akhtar et

al., 2019; Ramzan et al., 2023). Through qualitative analysis, this study seeks to provide nuanced insights into students' perspective about academic writing (Sari, 2023).

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of students in Islamic higher education institutions regarding academic writing (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of students' views and experiences within the context of their academic writing endeavors.

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who provided rich insights into the subject matter (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Sixty senior students majoring in English Education program were selected from Institut Agama Islam Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi (IAIDA) and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo (UNUJA). Among them, ten students who recently completed their thesis program in 2019 and 2018 were chosen for in-depth interviews, ensuring diversity in gender, academic performance, background (boarding school vs. village), and graduation timeliness.

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources to capture students' perspectives comprehensively (Creswell, 2012). Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with English Education students from IAIDA and UNUJA. These interviews delved into students' perceptions of academic writing in the context of their English teaching education. Additionally, secondary data sources such as students' theses, teaching materials, and curriculum documents were examined to provide further insights into students' perspectives on academic writing.

In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method, enabling researchers to elicit detailed insights into students' perspectives on academic writing (Yin, 2018). The interviews were conducted face-to-face and online,

accommodating participants' preferences and availability. This approach facilitated a rich exploration of students' thoughts and experiences concerning academic writing within the Islamic higher education context.

Data analysis involved a systematic approach to identify and interpret themes related to students' perspectives on academic writing (Heriyanto, 2018). Transcriptions of the interviews were thoroughly reviewed to extract meaningful insights. Themes emerged through iterative coding and analysis, allowing researchers to uncover patterns and variations in students' perspectives. Thematic analysis was employed to organize and interpret the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' views on academic writing in Islamic higher education institutions.

Findings

English has become a language with immense benefits nowadays. Of the four English language skills, writing is a skill that must be mastered. Certainly, English language proficiency greatly assists students, especially in reference searching. On the academic front, many of the top-ranked journals, conferences, and research publications are in English (Ramzan et al., 2023).

From the data collected through interactions with IAIDA and UNUJA students, various perspectives emerge regarding the urgency of academic writing skills. (Björk & Räisänen, 2003) stated that students writing academic texts require integrated and flexible knowledge, both stored cognitively and externally, to smoothly manage the writing process. Academic writing refers to existing bodies of knowledge and therefore requires in-depth study of existing sources. Before writing, one must study what will be written. Unfortunately, many students are unprepared for writing tasks at the university level and lack determination in pursuing their goals.

Writing Skills in English Can be Supported by AI

The phenomenon observed among IAIDA and UNUJA students is the disparity in English language proficiency levels. Some students say they have

insufficient English skills, which hinder their academic writing. The main challenges faced are related to grammatical errors, sentence structures, and limitations in vocabulary use, which are inseparable from their writing process. As a result, their independent writing skills have not yet reached a good level of quality.

Based on this phenomenon, students see that artificial intelligence (AI) can be a valuable source of assistance in improving writing skills in English, helping with academic writing tasks more effectively. Consistent with what was stated by (Hana & Suwarti, 2020), AI can replace the role of English teachers and lecturers in the future because millennials are already proficient and tech-savvy in operating artificial intelligence.

From interviews with students, they use assisting platforms such as Google Translate, Grammarly, Quilbot, Connected Papers, Humata AI, and Elicit in their thesis writing. All students say they use Google Translate, while other platforms are not massively used by them. This differs from (Ramzan et al., 2023), who state that the biggest challenge for students lies in linguistic and grammatical aspects. Students do not consider linguistics as a challenge because they use artificial intelligence assistance. These platforms impact the quality of the writing they produce. EL said he wrote part of his thesis in Indonesian and then used Google Translate to translate it into English. The English Department head is also aware of this activity and does not prohibit it. "I also use Google Translate to assist my writing," said the IAIDA English Department head. However, what is expected by the department head and lecturers is for students to be able to use Google Translate wisely. This can be done by, for example, reading and correcting the translation results to avoid contextual errors. Common errors include translating place or person names into English, such as the name Syafaat becoming intercession. HL asserts that he faces challenges in digital literature, such as inaccuracies in the use of technology that affect the process of writing his work.

Although artificial intelligence (AI) aids in students' academic writing, it cannot generate ideas like humans. Imran & Almusharraf (2023) state that AI produces limited responses compared to human content. The content it produces

lacks current information and references, whereas humans can add anything based on knowledge and requirements because humans do not face such limitations.

Writing and Research Methodology Courses are Key in Academic Writing

All IAIDA and UNUJA students say that writing and research methodology courses play the most important role in academic writing. As discussed earlier, students do not see English proficiency as a hindrance because of the available technological assistance (AI). However, students see that academic writing requires academic ideas and structures taught in writing and research methodology courses. Some students say their lack of knowledge in writing or research methods is due to external factors such as dissatisfaction with the supervising lecturer. They hope lecturers pay more attention to students who still cannot follow the lecture material. In this regard, the English Department heads of both institutions emphasize that evaluation and curriculum improvement are always carried out to form a more synergistic and quality study program environment.

Clarity of Academic Writing Regulations

It cannot be denied that academic writing regulations are a system that can ensure that students can follow what has become the policy of the study program, faculty, or institution. Certainty about these regulations is considered very important in helping academic writing in accordance with the style of each study program environment. Students consider understanding the correct structure in writing a thesis to be a challenge in itself. Especially when the guidelines provided are late, they have difficulty adjusting the structure of their writing according to the intended format.

Students argue that there must be clear and strict rules for every policy given by the study program. Writing among IAIDA and UNUJA students is seen as a response to tasks, whereas writing tasks are given within a certain time frame; unfortunately, students never manage them according to the time (Akhtar, 2020). Some UNUJA and IAIDA students have the same view regarding the policies given by the study program; they see these policies as still flexible, so they are confused about following them. This affects the quality of their writing, which changes with the

presence of new policies or regulations. HS said, "I only received the thesis guidebook after almost completing my writing process, so I had to make adjustments." ZR also said that policies regarding deadlines affect the quality of writing, but unfortunately, the deadline becomes flexible in the last few days of the thesis exam. DL added, "I took the exam first even though the writing was not yet finished, the important thing is to meet the deadline."

Supporting the Academic Process

Students consider writing academic papers as a crucial requirement for completing academic tasks, such as theses, and as a crucial step in completing their studies. Some students consider writing to be a requirement of academic regulations that must be fulfilled. Unfortunately, as (Akhtar, 2020) opines, some students are still unable to manage writing time properly. DL said he felt his writing was not finished yet but had to be tested immediately to follow the academic schedule. AZ also said that his writing is a substance for passing, not yet emphasizing quality.

On the other hand, some students also have the same perspective regarding writing academic papers to support the academic process, but they add that their writing reflects the results of all the processes they have undergone while being students. HS said that for him, academic papers or theses are a form of work that must be appreciated. He understands that the thesis is not only a requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree but also as a work that reflects expertise and dedication in the field he is studying. In line with NZ who said that the results of his academic writing are satisfaction with the academic process he has gone through.

Developing Critical Thinking

Writing academic papers helps sharpen critical thinking skills, develop strong arguments, and evaluate information objectively to compile a well-documented argument. In an effort to improve writing quality, additional reading is needed. As (Sajjad et al., 2021) say, to improve writing skills, students must also read a lot so that they can improve their vocabulary throughout their English written structure and usage.

In general, the process of writing academic papers requires in-depth analysis, evaluation of various sources and information, and proof of the arguments presented. IZ believes that during the process of writing academic papers, one often has to deal with various perspectives, theories, and evidence that may be conflicting or require critical analysis. NZ also believes that in writing academic papers, students are required to be meticulous and have many reading references. HS views academic writing skills as a tool for conveying their ideas clearly, structured, and documented, so that they can be understood and accessed by readers.

The English Department heads of IAIDA and UNUJA also emphasize the importance of reading to improve the writing quality of students or lecturers. They make efforts to encourage reading and writing spirits in the study program environment, such as requiring students to participate in Community Service Program (KKN) by producing outputs in the form of writing, participating students in writing competitions, creating additional classes to discuss student writing progress, and rewarding students and lecturers who are able to publish articles in SINTA (Indonesian science and technology index).

Career Preparation and Professionalism

Students are aware that writing academic papers can influence future career opportunities. This skill is important in various fields of work and can enhance their professionalism in the workplace. IZ is convinced that English is important for everyone, including those living in rural areas.

They recognize that writing academic papers is not easy and can be challenging. However, they see it as an important part of self-development and their skills. IZ realizes the importance of academic writing skills in the current academic environment. Although difficult, he sees it as an important process in self-development. HL also demonstrates his commitment to completing his thesis despite revisions that need to be made.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the current landscape of academic writing skills among undergraduate students, with a particular focus on language proficiency, pedagogical support, regulatory frameworks, and the implications for career readiness. The consensus in existing literature regarding the paramount importance of English writing skills in academic contexts, as highlighted by (Ramzan et al., 2023). Like previous research, students in this study acknowledge that proficiency in English is a crucial factor for academic success, particularly in accessing top-tier academic resources such as journals and research publications. This underscores the pivotal role of English proficiency as a gateway to scholarly discourse and knowledge dissemination in a globalized academic landscape. The recognition of English proficiency as a prerequisite for academic advancement resonates with the broader discourse on the dominance of English as the *lingua franca* of academia.

Moreover, the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist in writing tasks reflects the ongoing integration of technology into language learning, a trend discussed by (Hana & Suwarti, 2020). Students' reliance on AI platforms like Google Translate and Grammarly underscores their recognition of technology as a valuable resource for enhancing writing proficiency. However, a contrasting perspective emerges regarding the limitations of AI in generating original content, as emphasized by (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023). While AI tools can aid in grammar correction and language translation, they fall short in generating novel ideas and insights, highlighting the irreplaceable role of human creativity in academic writing.

Furthermore, the emphasis on writing and research methodology courses mirrors the findings of Björk & Räisänen (2003), who underscored the pivotal role of such courses in developing academic writing skills. Students' recognition of the importance of structured academic training in writing and research methodologies underscores the significance of pedagogical interventions in fostering writing proficiency. However, discrepancies arise regarding the clarity of academic writing regulations, with students in this study expressing challenges due to flexible policies

and late guideline provisions, contrasting with the need for transparent guidelines emphasized in previous research (Akhtar, 2020).

Despite these differences, both studies underscore the importance of regulatory clarity in facilitating academic writing. Moreover, the emphasis on developing critical thinking through academic writing aligns with existing literature emphasizing the role of writing in enhancing analytical skills and argumentation (Sajjad et al., 2021). The recognition of academic writing as a tool for cultivating critical thinking underscores its broader educational significance beyond mere linguistic proficiency.

The study highlights the varying levels of English language proficiency among students, with many relying on artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as Google Translate and Grammarly to aid their writing process. This reliance on AI aligns with recent research indicating a growing trend of AI utilization in language correction and grammatical support (Li et al., 2023). While AI tools provide valuable assistance, concerns remain regarding their limitations in generating original ideas and nuanced language use, echoing findings from Imran & Almusharraf (2023).

The emphasis placed on writing and research methodology courses underscores the importance of structured academic training in fostering writing proficiency. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of explicit instruction in writing skills development (Hajirasouli et al., 2022). Effective pedagogical approaches in these courses are crucial for imparting not only language proficiency but also critical thinking and research skills essential for academic writing, as discussed by Graham (2022).

The challenges associated with unclear academic writing regulations highlight the need for transparent and consistent guidelines. This echoes findings from Arneback & Fadli (2023), who emphasized the importance of clear regulatory frameworks in guiding students' academic writing endeavors. Ambiguities in policies may hinder students' comprehension and adherence to academic standards, emphasizing the importance of clarity and consistency in regulatory practices.

The recognition of academic writing as a tool for career preparation underscores its broader implications beyond academia. This resonates with research highlighting the transferability of writing skills to various professional contexts (Hysaj, 2020). The ability to communicate effectively through writing is increasingly valued in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of nurturing writing proficiency in higher education settings.

Conclusion

Students in Islamic higher education institutions face notable challenges in academic writing but also identify key tools and strategies to improve their skills. The integration of AI, effective pedagogical support, clear regulations, and the development of critical thinking and career preparation are essential for enhancing academic writing proficiency. Addressing these areas can lead to better support for students, ultimately improving their academic and professional outcomes.

Students of IAIDA and UNUJA recognize the necessity of English proficiency for accessing top-tier academic resources and participating in scholarly discourse. However, they face significant challenges with grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary, which impact the quality of their academic writing.

AI tools such as Google Translate and Grammarly are commonly used to support students' writing efforts. While these tools assist with grammar and translation, they cannot generate original content or nuanced language, highlighting the indispensable role of human creativity and critical thinking in academic writing.

Writing and research methodology courses are crucial for developing academic writing skills. Students value these courses but express the need for more effective instruction and attentive supervision from lecturers to better support their learning. Clear and consistent academic writing regulations are essential. Students encounter difficulties due to flexible policies and late guideline provisions, which can hinder their ability to follow academic standards and negatively affect the quality of their writing.

Students perceive academic writing as vital for completing their studies and as a reflection of their academic journey. Writing skills are also seen as critical for future career opportunities, emphasizing the importance of nurturing these skills in higher education settings. Academic writing is recognized as a tool for enhancing critical thinking, fostering strong arguments, and evaluating information objectively. This underscores its broader educational significance beyond linguistic proficiency.

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