EFL students' challenges in writing research background at one of the universities in Cirebon

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Academic writing is one of the important elements at the higher education's placement as a critical requirement to get a bachelor's degree. Research paper are one part of academic writing. This current study aims to explore the concerns and difficulties in writing research background faced by the English Department students at one of the universities in Cirebon in the academic year 2020/2021. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design in which five students participated as the respondents of the study. The interview and the documentation were used to collect the data as it was able revealed the generic structure and allowed to get more accurate information. The results revealed that some of the respondents find difficulties in composing the generic structure of the research background. Moreover, the respondents also signaled that they had trouble finding relevant the previous studies. Therefore, they were struggling to develop and explore ideas into coherent writing in academic writing. It is suggested that the students must master the topic that will be written about to minimize difficulties and obstacles that may occur.

How to Cite: Parwati, I., & Aprianti, F. (2022). EFL students' challenges in writing research background at one of the universities in Cirebon. *International Undergraduate Conference on English Education, IUCEE Proceeding 2022, 1*(1), p. 169-174

1. Introduction

One of the features of higher education or university level is academic writing. A research paper is one sort of academic writing. Before arranging the paper, students must develop a research proposal. Indisputably, while producing a proposal that will be used as a research paper, the research background becomes the most complex and challenging aspect. Lilis & Scott in (Azizah & Budiman, 2018), stated that academic writing is the main aspect of the scholarship of teaching and learning in university level. This is due to the fact that academic writing is customized to the intended audience and the purpose of producing it is to obtain a bachelor's degree. Fukuoka and Fuji stated in (Ankawi, 2020) students must be able to incorporate abilities such as gathering information, reformulating and summarizing sources, arranging ideas, editing, and finally proofreading in academic writing. Meanwhile, Tardy (as cited in Azizah, 2017) because academic writing frequently needs students to construct an idea from an expert point of view, despite the fact that they are not considered experts on the issue. This demonstrates the significance of academic writing in the production of new knowledge or ideas in the disciplines of education, social science, culture, or the environment, depending on the research topic.

In academic writing, there is planning research. Planning research is the first step in writing a research essay, a journal, an article, or other piece of writing that contains an introduction to the topic and background, the purpose and the advantages of research, and the premise to solving a problem on the chosen topic (Ahmed, 2019). It indicates that the research background is included in the introduction and is an integral part of the research process. Aside from the title and content of the research. In this situation, the introduction consists of three parts. The first part providing background information according to the tittle taken, the second part justifies the need to explore areas that are not is known by the reader, while the third component states the hypothesis or describes the research's objective and purpose by KN (as cite in Pramonojati et al., 2020).

From the theories, academic writing is one of the most significant aspects of education, particularly at the university level. This is the purpose of the final writing requirement for bachelor's degree, which is a paper. Considering its importance, various approaches and methods are continuously developed and implemented in order to promote the students' skills in academic writing. Providing the students with writing portfolio, implementing topical and project-based syllabus, also using ICT in the writing class are just some of the popular approaches popularly used in Indonesian setting (Aprianti & Winarto, 2021). The aforementioned effort is specifically aimed to let the students familiar with the stages of academic writing as well as to introduce the cycle of writing process.

Furthermore, the research background is the initial stage in writing a research paper. It is on the front page, and the reader will read the background information first in the introduction. The research background is difficult to write, but it follows the same method as other writing skills. Zamel (as cited in Madjid, 2020) described the writing process as exploratory and generative, in which writers find, generate, and explore ideas while attempting to approximate meaning. The most important thing to remember when writing a research paper is to think about numerous aspects of the writing process, such as data collection, drafting, revising, and editing.

The background section provides a review of current research, highlighting flaws, future directions, and gaps that must be addressed. This section provides a compelling rationale for conducting the study described in the research protocol (Majid, 2017). When it comes to presenting their study, every researcher believes that creating a research background is critical. The research background not only explains why the researcher chose to undertake the research and how it differs from past research, but it also explains why the researcher chose to do the research in the first place. Several ideas, data, actual facts, laboratory observations, and literature studies must be used to support the research background. Furthermore, research background acts as a door opener, defining the researcher's first perception of the research and, indirectly, the researcher's qualifications. In research writing, students have to think, change and construct ideas, see how well it relates to the next sentence or not. Writing research background also has the same process as other types of writing (Madjid et al., 2020).

The low level of academic description writing is due to some students' inability to organize the generic structure of the research background. Given the phenomenon, writing background research is critical in a variety of studies; journals, proposals, papers, and so on. This occurs because students find it difficult to give solution, develop topics, fill in gaps, and begin writing. As EFL students in Indonesian, we understand that English is not their first language. The difficulties include a lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, and a lack of confidence. This makes developing and exploring ideas into coherent writing difficult in academic writing.

Taking into account the source of the problems, the researchers will investigate the EFL students' challenges in writing research background. The researcher believes that if students understand the obstacles to academic writing, the challenge can be solved. The capacity to master the chosen topic is the most important characteristics, as it allows to develop and explore issues easily. Researches have focused their attention on writing skill as a critical talent that contributes to learning any language and without which education is nearly impossible, as stated by Shangarfan & Mamipour (as cited in Ahmed, 2019).

Responding to these fundamental issues, this study attempts to form a questions, which is "what are the challenges found in the writing research background at 8th semester students English Department at one of the universities in Cirebon?"

2. Method

The aimed of this study was to investigate the challenges in writing research background faced by the English department students as English Foreign Language (EFL) students. The participants were taken from five students at random who volunteered from the English Department in the academic year 2020/2021 at one of the universities in Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia. Then, they have graduated, which has led them to a research paper as their final goal to get a bachelor's degree. To succeed in achieving the aim, this research used a case study research design under a qualitative approach. In addition, as an instrument to collect data obtained from two sources of data using interviews and documentation. According to Creswell (2018) setting the boundaries for the study through sampling and recruitment, gathering information through unstructured or semi structured observation and interviews, documents, and visual materials, and establishing the protocol for recording information are all step in the data collection. The interview is primary data. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from documentation text.

The researcher in this case conducted online interviews. Unstructured interviews are used to collect data in this research, because to get more in-depth the data. This was due to an increase in Covid-19 cases in Cirebon. Interviewing is one of the most common data collection methods in the social sciences. Any face-to-face or non-face interaction between two or more people with a particular purpose in mind is considered to as a person-to-person interaction (Kumar, 2011:389). The interview was followed by a phone interview with additional questions concerning the difficulties in writing research background. The researcher next analyzed the document's research background text to synchronize interview results, and then copied the background text sheet to aid in data analysis. Copying aids in determining the substance of the study background text. The following are the steps for gathering data from documentation text (research background text): 1) Obtaining authorization from the program's head. 2) Select a research paper at random to work on. 3) The researcher makes a copy of the research background's contents. 4) Emphasizes the relevance of the research background.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section highlights all of the findings and discusses the study's implications regarding the EFL students' challenges in writing research background at one of the universities in Cirebon. The purpose of this study is to investigate and address issues in research background writing. The outcomes of this study are based on the interview the students and a text analysis of their research background texts. In the academic year 2020/2021, an interview was conducted to answer a research question about the obstacles encountered in the research background "*what are the challenges found in the writing research background at 8th semester students English Department at one of the universities in Cirebon*". In addition, five selected texts research background were written by them. Table 1, lists the names of their research papers as well as the challenges they had in drafting the study background.

Table 1.   The students' challenges

Title and Challenges in Writing Research Background		
Initial	*Title of Research Paper*	*Challenges in Writing Research Background*
LL	An Analysis of Teacher Talk in an EFL Classroom Interaction	- Composing step by step writing - Explaining the essence of the problem taken - Being consistent and focused on the core of the discussion
Y	Sociocultural Analysis on a Textbook Grow With English for Students of Elementary School	- Providing solutions related to the problems taken - Composing step by step writing
SS	The Implementation of Mind Mapping Technique in Teaching Students Speaking Skills at 7th Grade MTS Madinatunnajah	- Finding the source of theory - Determining the solution to be given
IF	An Analysis on HOTS of Reading Exercises in English Textbook	- Arranging the placement of generic structure
CN	-	- Composing systematic writing steps

Based on table 1, the following was the outcome of the student interview:

Respondent 1 wrote a paper entitled An Analysis of Teacher Talk in an EFL Classroom Interaction. During the process of writing the paper R1 indicated that there were three challenges faced. The first challenge was creating step-by-step writing, because when writing the background R1 found that it frequently did not match the step-by-step that has been created, causing it to run poorly. The second challenge that R1 found was creating an unambiguous background explanation; this is especially important in the case of the problem to be solved. In this case, R1 needed to make sure to explain everything clearly and without ambiguity. The last challenge that R1 got was in finding the central theme of the discussion must be compatible with the problem or title under investigation.

This finding is further supported by the following statement of R1.

R1: *"Yes, I often found difficulties in writing. In writing a research background, I encountered three challenges. The challenge was writing in a step-by-step, explaining the significance of the problems encountered and remaining consistent and focused on the problem that corresponds to the title. It frequently stifles the writing process and necessitates time to revise so that the contents of the research background are structured and systematic."*

Respondent 2 wrote a paper entitled *Sociocultural Analysis on a Textbook Grow with English for Students of Elementary School.* R2 mentioned two challenges in writing research background during the process of writing papers. The first challenge was to investigate the background with the solution used to overcome it, because R2 assumes that when researching a topic, it must provide recommendations or solutions to the reader. Furthermore, R2 faced the second challenge of putting the steps of writing together in a logical order, which is critical in writing so that the contents of the written work can be understood.

This result is supported by R2's statement below.

R2: *"Yes, I found some writing challenges. The issues I discovered were threefold: the first, to explain the background; and to provide a solution that would be employed to solve the problem. The second stage was to organize writing according to the writing step. These two issues have been challenging for me to deal with during the research background preparation phase."*

Respondent 3 wrote a paper entitled *Using the Mind Mapping Technique in the 7th Grade MTS to Teach Students Speaking Skills Madinatunnajah.* During the writing process research background, R3 faced two challenges. The first challenge was finding the source of the theory needed, such as a journal, because, based on R3's experienced, it is sometimes difficult to found some of the variables that are found to support the theory. And the second challenge was providing a solution, because R3 believes that in some studies, researchers usually only want to analyze a phenomenon or a method.

This finding is assisted by further R3 statement.

R3*:"Yes, I found two difficulties in writing the background. Based on my experienced, the difficulty I faced was finding sources of theory to support the research content. Then, determining the recommended solution for readers is a big challenge for me, because usually a researcher only wants to examine a problem or phenomenon."*

Respondent 4 wrote a paper entitled *An Analysis of HOTS of Reading Exercises in an English Textbook.* When writing the research background, R4 stated that the placement of a generic structure is the most complex challenge. R2 was to assume that if the background of the research objective to be carried out is misplaced, it will not reach the reader. In addition, R2 explained that a background is very important in the preparation of research and include an interesting description of the research that is raised to be discussed, so that the background of the research written must be systematic.

R4 supports this finding with the following statement.

R4: *"Yes, I found writing difficult. I only had one difficulty, which was compiling the placement of a generic structure. Why? Because I believe that a good background is built on the foundation of a good and correct systematic that follows the generic structure. It's also worth noting that in a study, the background is crucial."*

Respondent 5 stated that during the process of writing the background, she faced difficulties. The difficulty faced by R5 was how to compose step-by-step writing. This is because the background of the research is a determinant of the reader's first impression of the research being appointed and also indirectly the qualifications of the research. R5 was adding that the background will describe the extent of the urgency of the research, how strong the scientific basis is, and the flow of the researcher's thinking in examining the problem and planning the study to be carried out.

The following R5 statement adds to this result.

R5: *"I had some challenges while composing the background. Compiling step-by-step writing was a struggle for me. It's obvious to me that describing the background is the most difficult component of the study preparation process. Why? Because, in reality, not every researcher, especially inexperienced researchers, is able to convey their findings effectively. It requires time and work to modify and perfect it on a regular basis. As a result, it's not surprising that preparing the background takes a long time when leading the final project. Even after the data analysis results are achieved, there are situations when the backdrop content needs to be fixed again."*

According to the preceding definition, the most common hurdles are offering solutions to the problems encountered, step-by-step writing, and locating theoretical materials. This makes it difficult for students at one of Cirebon's universities to write their background papers. Furthermore, the five respondents' backgrounds matched the generic structure or content of the background, based on the results of the documentation analysis. According to Sugiyono (1999:302) the problem's background, the history and events that are occurring in a study project. Although there appear to be deviations from existing standards, both scientific standards and rules, in that event. In this context, the researcher must study the problem in order to make it obvious.

The study conducted by Ansari (as cited in Alharbi, 2019) EFL context has shown that research on second language writing still lacks in the aspect of writing weakness to arranging the sentence by sentence and how to improve students' writing in explore an idea. Meanwhile, Al-Badi et al (as cited in Suryatiningsih, 2019) discovered various issues linked to EFL students' academic writing challenges. As a result, subjects encounter identical challenges in academic writing regardless of their past educational level. Others include researching appropriate themes and sources, as well as references and citations, which are less difficult.

The majority of EFL students struggle with writing, particularly in producing a decent and correct logical and cohesive work (RahmtAllah, 2020). Furthermore, in an EFL situation, standard academic writing procedures could be modified to improve writers' abilities. Beck and Jeffery; Bai, Wang, and Nie (as cited in Sudirman et al., 2020). The EFL students have several errors' in the pieces of writing, which are analyzed and categorized. Dulay, Burt and Krashen state (in Sermsook et al., 2017) the six types include deletion of grammatical morphemes, double marking of semantic elements, irregular rules, improper word forms, alternating usage of two or more forms, and miss ordering. Writing, particularly academic writing writing, is thus a challenge for EFL students.

The researcher must be able to demonstrate the existence of a deviation and write down why it has to be studied through the analysis of this problem. As a result, students' EFL faces a variety of obstacles. The study's findings demonstrated that students had more difficulty writing, particularly accumulating step-by-step background writing stages, while knowing the generic framework.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that arranging the generic structure in the background is more difficult for EFL students. The challenges that students find included preparation steps by step writing in research, the solutions given or offered for the difficulties being researched, and locating the source of the theory are all common challenges in this scenario. These issues stem from a lack of proficiency in numerous parts of the English language as an EFL learner. For EFL students, one feasible option is to require them to master a written or predefined topic. As a result, the challenges that may arise when writing the background, which is crucial, can be reduced and minimized.

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