

Exploring Perceptions of Indonesian Business and Administration Students on Their English Academic Writing Skill in ESP

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Abstract

Writing academic papers is challenging for students majoring non-English programs in higher education. This is because they must both understand academic writing conventions and English writing rules at the same time. This case study explores further perceptions of university students of Business and Administration regarding their academic writing skill. 20 students were selected by purposive sampling technique and were administered an online questionnaire to collect the data. Afterwards, three volunteer students joined in-depth interview to find out more information from the online questionnaire. The data were then analyzed by two techniques including frequency count for the quantitative data and qualitative analysis by employing thematic analysis for the qualitative data. The results discovered that students' perceptions of their academic ESP written competence in Business English were positive. Students are aware of both their own and the ESP writing requirements. However, these positive attitudes have not yet been fulfilled with appropriate writing lessons. Therefore, it is important for further research to conduct a study regarding the ESP writing lesson that works best for the students.

Keywords: Academic writing, business English, English for Specific Purposes, students' perceptions, writing proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Alongside the trend toward globalization, English for Specific Purposes, also known as ESP, has developed into a worldwide phenomenon (Belcher, 2006). The production of students and workers who are linguistically competent and who are capable of pursuing academic or occupational goals is one of the primary concerns of ESP. Academic writing, which is defined as a written task or assignment given to students in academic situations, is a significant part of the teaching and learning in ESP (Al-

Khasawneh, 2010). Especially in the tertiary education, students are expected to take an active role in the development of their academic writing, which requires them to acquire specific skills related to academic writing (Montaner-Vilalba, 2021).

The research report is an excellent example of academic writing, and it serves this purpose very well. In the context of this work, a research paper is defined as a written academic paper or essay on a specific topic that is relevant to the Faculty of Business that is prepared by ESP (English for Specific

Purposes) students. The topic of the research paper must be relevant to the Faculty of Business.

Students of ESP often find that writing a research paper is a challenging task (Foster, 2006; Rohayah & Naginder, 2004; Ismail et al., 2010; Pandey, 2020). The majority of students approach the development of their writing skills as an impromptu activity, which leads to this result. It has been discovered that certain students taking ESP have a greater amount of difficulty with issues related to language than with their general academic writing ability (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Kotamjani, et.al, 2018). Several researchers (Hisham, 2008; Al-Khasaweh, 2010) sought to investigate the academic writing difficulties of Arab post-graduate students enrolled in a Business English course. The findings of their investigations demonstrated that university students experienced difficulties with the organization of ideas, grammar, vocabulary register, spelling, and referencing. On the other hand, Kotamjani et al. (2018) discovered, through qualitative research, that the most difficult areas were writing coherently, paraphrasing, and citing sources.

Academic writing skills require not only the organization of thoughts (Rafik-Galea, et.al., 2012), as students must invent ideas in order to create facts in accordance with particular academic conventions, but also discussion and thoughts on a variety of topics, such as the knowledge of particular writing rules (Rafik-Galea, et.al., 2012). This is because students must invent ideas in order to create facts in accordance with particular academic conventions (Arumugam, 2011). Many students of English as a second language are unaware of the challenges that some ESL academics face when attempting to adhere to the required guidelines for the format and style of research papers. Additionally, these students lack the abilities necessary for academic writing, which causes

them to struggle with academic written competence (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). It is common practice for successful writers to hone their craft through the use of more conventional forms of education (Kim & Kim, 2005). As a result, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs in higher education should employ strategies such as helpful approaches, feedback, and collaborative multi-drafting to assist students in developing their academic writing skills (Bowker, 2007; Heffernan, 2006).

Research on teaching and learning academic writing competence in ESP has focused on students' and instructors' perceptions (Ismail, 2011; Butler, et.al. 2014) on the importance of gaining and improving academic writing abilities in ESP and EAP classrooms. These perceptions have been gleaned from studies on teaching and learning academic writing competence in ESP. Ismail (2011) conducted a study that was very similar to this one, in which she investigated ESP students' perceptions of writing in general and an academic writing course that was a component of an ESP educational program in particular. The authors came to the conclusion that ESP students were aware of both their own needs and the ESL writing standards, which suggested that students held favorable attitudes toward academic writing skills. This was reached after concluding that ESP students were aware of both their own needs and the ESL writing standards.

Butler, et al. (2014) studied not only the perceptions of ESP students but also the perceptions of ESP teachers regarding the students' and teachers' written academic ability. The findings of this study showed that both students and teachers place a high value on competency in academic writing, and this value is held in high esteem not only from the perspective of the process approach but also from the perspective of the product approach. This value is held in high esteem

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In line with this study, which focuses on ESP academic written competence, Montaner-Vilalba (2017) has proved that blogging as a tool for developing ESP written competence in the context of Vocational Training is noteworthy. In his case study, Montaner-Villalba (2017) demonstrated that there was no change in the development of writing skills, but there was a significant improvement in the acquisition of specialized vocabulary and reading skills. This research was performed in person. Nonetheless, in two years, Montaner-Villalba (2019) demonstrated in his action-research study how blogging from the perspective of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in an ESP course helped students in Vocational Training to significantly improve their ESP writing skills. The experiment was carried out entirely online and showed a great impact. Furthermore, regarding blogging from a PBL perspective, Sa'diyah and Cahyono (2019) conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine the influence of EFL written competence. They discovered that experimental group students' writing performance improved significantly compared to its counterpart.

Based on the given review of the previous studies, most of the studies focused on the impact particular interventions on ESP students' academic writing ability. To date, a few studies explored qualitatively how ESP students particularly in Indonesian higher education context viewed their academic writing skills. Therefore, this present study is devoted to further exploring students' perceptions of ESP academic writing skills. In line with the key objective of the present study, the following research inquiries were raised:

1. How do business and administration students view English as a language to write academic writing?
2. How do the students perceive their academic writing ability?
3. How do the students evaluate their writing proficiency in English for specific purposes?

METHODOLOGY

In this present study, a qualitative case study was employed. Ary, et.al (2010) defined qualitative research as an examination of the quality of relationships, activities, situations, and materials. In addition, the objective of qualitative research was to facilitate a deeper understanding of a phenomenon, such as an environment, a process, or a belief. For this study, the researchers intend to delve deeper into how business and administration students perceive the academic writing process in English during Covid-19. Therefore, the selected participants in this study were Business and Administration majors in one of state universities in Medan, Indonesia during the odd semester of 2022/2023. Twenty students enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes course for one semester and were required to compose academic writing in the classroom as their final project. This circumstance of the students prompted the researchers to select the participants because they met the criteria or cases they intended to be investigated. This technique is known as purposive sampling (Patton, 2002).

In addition, a three-part online questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants. There are four questions in the first section aiming to collect information regarding participants' perceptions of writing in English; five items in the second section to determine students' perceptions of their own writing competence in English; and two questions in the third section aiming to determine students' perceptions of their own

writing competence in English for Specific Purposes. The researchers analyzed the data using the frequency count method. The perceptions of the students were then confirmed through in-depth interviews with three volunteer participants regarding the three related topics in the research questions. Within 30 minutes to one hour, the interview was conducted online through the WhatsApp chat application. In this instance, the researchers protected the identity of the participants by using pseudonyms when referring to them. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to qualitative analysis in accordance with the procedures for thematic content analysis outlined by Miles et al (2014). These procedures involved data reduction, data visualization, and conclusion verification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study seeks to investigate the views of Indonesian Business and Administration students regarding their academic English writing skills in ESP. The data could be classified into three categories: first, students' perceptions of using English to write academic text; second, students' perceptions of their English writing skill; and third, students' ability to write in English for specific purposes. The results of data analysis concerning the three key categories are presented and discussed consecutively below.

The Students' View on Writing Academic Essay in English

The online questionnaire was administered to 20 students majoring Business and Administration in one university in Indonesia. As presented in chart 1., it is found that there are 19 students had positive perceptions on writing academic essay in English as this skill is considered relevant to their academic competence as Business and Administration students. Similarly, the total number of students who

choose writing in English to support their career is also 19. Then, it is followed by 18 students who have positive perception on writing in English if they keep practicing while 16 of them stand to love writing in English.



Figure 1. Students' view on their English writing skill.

This result implied that ESP students were conscious of the need to improve the quality of their written competence in the English language. This result was in accordance with research by Ismail (2011) about the EFL needs of Arab undergraduate students in both the College of Education as well as the College of Humanities. The outcomes proved that the students understood perfectly the relevance of improving their written competence in English. It correlates with the interview result that shows students' intention to learn English is for their future goals as stated by Melinda below:

"I do really think that the ability to write in English is beneficial for my academic study. Especially when I need to write an article in English for my final project in university.. Besides, as I aim to work in international business sectors which of course require a command of the English language, being able to write in English will be a selling skill. (Excerpt 1-Melinda)

However, it seems that the students' views on the benefits of English for academic writing to their views on English vocabularies are confronting. The participants in this study reported having low level Business English vocabularies that they can use in academic writing. This is also the reason why most of the students think they are not passionate to do writing in English.

“I don't love writing in English because I have less vocabularies to be used in my writing. I need more English vocabularies regarding Business and Administration topics. So, I believe that I might be a good writer in English for Business if I keep practicing using the vocabularies. (Excerpt 2-Erwin)

This finding suggests that the students' academic ESP writing was initially poor quality because the course of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) does not contain an adequate quantity of academic business vocabularies. Therefore, the students felt necessary to improve their English skills. Therefore, an evaluation and reflection on the ESP course given to students of Business and Administration major is necessary to be conducted for future studies. Other author (Ismail, 2011) found the same problem also suggested that reflection is essential due to the fact that it enables students to voice their opinions and assess their own experience of learning a language.

Students' Perception on Their English Writing Ability

While analyzing the data for this theme, we found that most of the students who participated in this research having a pessimistic view of their writing abilities in English. Thus, students' perceptions of their writing EFL competence were negative.

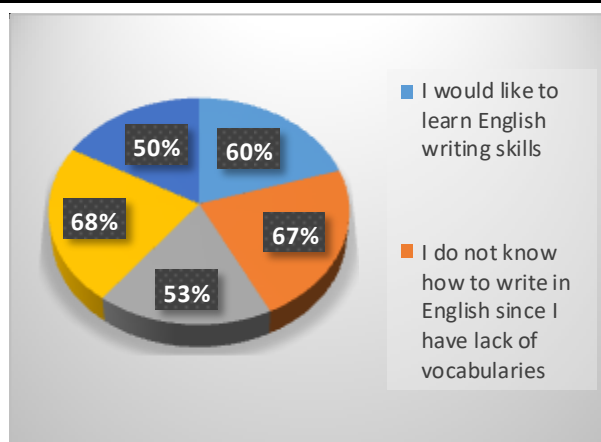


Figure 2. Students' perception on their English writing ability

A closer look at Figure 2 shows that there are 13 students who perceive to do not like writing in English since they do not know how. This number is similar to the students' belief on their poor writing ability in both Indonesian and English. Therefore, 12 of them assume that they are bad on English writing. Eventually, before starting the writing tasks, 10 students felt unhappy joining it. This situation was clarified by the students' interview showing that their despises was affected by their educational background when they did not have related experience to write academic papers such as scientific writing in English.

“I was having no experience in writing English scientific article regarding business or administration field in my previous school. I found myself blank in the middle of generating my idea into English words” (Excerpt 3- Ayu)

This result could be interpreted in terms of the student's educational background. Many of them have little experience in English academic writing related to business and administration. Similarly, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013) found that students' writing experience in

their native language affects their ability to write in EFL. Their study showed that Japanese students were better at reading than Americans, who were better at writing. Kobayashi and Rinnert (2002) found that ESP Spanish students' writing skills were influenced by their first language writing experience. The ESP students in this present study have not written any academic texts before enrolling in university. Therefore, their perception that their first language writing experience could influence their writing skills is consistent with the given findings.

Moreover, students continue to show that their writing ability has little development since most of business and administration lecturers did not correct their errors, which may have contributed to their erroneous perception of their writing abilities.

"I have no idea whether my writing can be considered good enough or not. I mostly only collect my writing to the lecturers and eventually earn my score at the end of the semester." (Excerpt 4 – Erwin)

This perception may have been caused by the fact that students did not receive any feedback on their writing from their teachers. Students who took part in this research might have been led to believe, incorrectly, that they had achieved the level of written ESP proficiency they had set out to achieve. It is extremely important to keep in mind that a content instructor is not the same thing as a language instructor. As a result, it is not the primary responsibility of a content instructor to correct linguistic errors.

When asked if they were good writers in English as well as in Bahasa, their native language, they responded that their writing skill in both languages was not advanced. These students responded that they did not consider themselves to be proficient writers

in their mother tongue. As a consequence, it is possible that this condition influence their capability to develop a proficient writing competence in EFL, which is the subject of study in the research that is currently being conducted.

"Writing in the Indonesian language is worrisome for me. I sometimes failed to create a structured paragraph. Writing in English would be more trouble since not only I need to think about the idea but also need to translate what I have in mind into English words" (Excerpt 4- Ayu)

This issue was in line with both Ismail (2011) and Spack (2016) who revealed that learning a student's first language might possibly shape how students experienced learning a foreign language. The results of both of these studies were in line with one another when it came to this matter. According to the findings of this study, the students of business and administration who participated may need additional instruction on ESP writing competence in order to improve their level of competence, as the authors who were mentioned above have stated. The improvement of their language proficiency as well as the methods that are used to research it could be a potential topic for future study.

Students' Writing Ability in English for Specific Purposes

In addition, in response to the third research question (How do students rate their ability to write in English for specific purposes?), it was discovered that the students had a reasonable amount of self-assurance regarding their capacity to write in ESP. This may be attributable to their preconceived notions regarding their writing proficiency level, which, from their point of view, they regarded themselves as being

sufficient. It can be seen from Figure 3 that 12 students perceive that their experience in ESP writing competence class was enjoyable whereas 11 of them think it was useful.

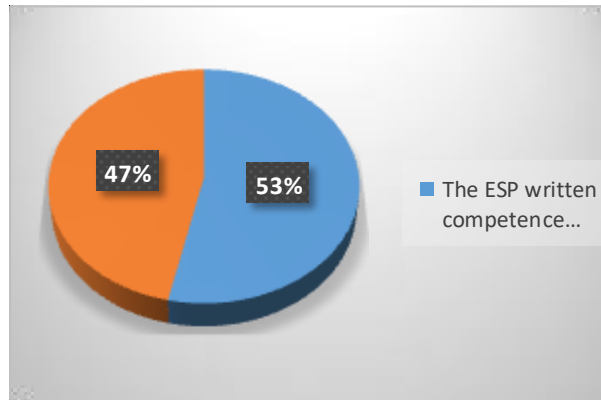


Figure 3. Students' writing experience in ESP

It is possible that these students believe the practice they're getting to develop their ESP writing competence is easy, and as a result, they don't believe they're acquiring significant learning. This can be attributed to the fact that they don't believe they're acquiring significant learning.

"I have low level of self-esteem to learn English in ESP even though I am not sure my writing capability will fulfill the requirement. However, I believe that it is talking about my field of study in business and administration, I will have more things to write". (Excerpt 5-Melinda)

In addition, a significant amount of writing exercises has been incorporated into the course. Students who took part in the study noted that practicing their ESL writing skills enabled them to plan, organize, edit, and ultimately come to a conclusion with their essays. These ESP students believe that their perspectives and expectations regarding learning and teaching in the classroom are valuable, and their efforts to learn are always guided by these components. Additionally,

they believe that their perspectives and expectations regarding learning and teaching in the classroom are unique.

"Learning ESP in one semester makes me experiencing another way of learning. I learn about planning, organizing, editing, and making conclusion in my writing accordingly" (Excerpt 6-Erwin)

The findings of the 'course attractiveness' variable indicate that students majoring in Business and Administration had an unfavorable opinion of this learning experience on the application of ESP written competence. Their lack of experience writing for specific purposes in their native language, which is Indonesian, may be responsible for their negative attitude, which can be attributed to the fact that they have been studying Business and Administration. They may have believed that students gained new knowledge by participating in this learning experience, which may have contributed to their perception that the ESP written competence experience was enjoyable. If they believed that students gained new knowledge, then they may have thought that participating in this learning experience was enjoyable.

This result was in line with what Ismail (2011) and Storch and Tapper (2009) highlighted regarding the perspectives of university students on their learning experience in the application of ESP written skills practice. Both authors came to the conclusion that the perspectives that their students held on this matter were comparable. The authors of these two studies came to the conclusion that educational programs on English for Academic Programs have the potential to have a positive impact on students' attitudes toward their own writing, which in turn has a positive impact on the writing quality produced by students.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the perceptions of university students of Business and Administration regarding their academic writing skill were investigated into three main themes including the students' perception on the use of English for academic writing, the students' perception on their writing ability in English and their perception on the English writing in ESP context. The results highlighted the students' optimistic attitudes toward the use of English for writing academic essay as it supports their study and future career. However, this positive attitude confronts the students' English writing skill as they faced some significant troubles. They considered to have lack of English vocabularies regarding the business and administration topic and have low level of writing skill in their native language as it affects their writing in foreign language. As a consequence making them have low self-esteem to do English writing in ESP. Nevertheless, in some ways, the students were still able to experience the ESP course as enjoyable and useful activities. As a conclusion, it is suggested for ESP teachers and researchers to conduct need analysis and reflection on the course as it may help the lesson to be more students-centered.

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