

## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING INTRODUCTION FOR RESEARCH ARTICLES

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the difficulties faced by students in writing introductions for research articles. A qualitative analysis method was used with a qualitative descriptive design approach. Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. Thirty-three students from the fourth semester of the English Education Study Program were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their difficulties in writing introductions for research articles. The results of the questionnaire showed that the students had nine difficulties faced. The difficulties faced by the students were as follows: 1) determining the topic and title of the research articles, 2) identifying and formulating a problem for research articles, 3) citing and using references in research articles, 4) determining the research gap in the research articles, 5) using sentence structure in research articles, 6) grammar, spelling, writing mechanics, 7) motivation, 8) anxiety, 9) time management. Writing essays is challenging for students in English Education Study Program. Further research is suggested to find practical strategies for teaching academic writing courses.

**Keywords:** *Academic Writing, Research Articles, Students Difficulties*

### Introduction

Writing skills are essential nowadays because people use not only verbal communication to communicate with each other but also non-verbal communication. In other words, writing is a necessary form of communication used as a communication tool to connect people. According to Kellogg (2001), writing is a cognitive process that tests memory, thinking skills, and verbal commands to express ideas successfully; proficiency in composing a text indicates successful learning of a second language. As a second language learner, good writing skills enable students to convey thoughts and communicate ideas so that others can understand them well. Therefore, writing is one of the most prominent skills that English language learners must master. In addition, writing ability is also essential because it determines students' success in learning English.

Academic research papers are expected to be structured in a manner defined by particular norms, standards, conventions, and rhetorical moves that make them different from writing for other purposes (Cargill & O'Connor, 2013). The structure of the undergraduate project report consists of an abstract and five sections: introduction, literature review, method, results and discussion, and conclusion. In this study, the researcher wants to know students' difficulties in writing an introduction. The role of the introduction, in general, is to convey the topic or argument that authors highlight in their manuscripts. As an opening, the introduction captures the reader's attention while introducing the significance of the study. It conveys a lot of information to readers (Claremont, 2017). The introduction serves the purpose of leading the reader from a general subject area to a particular field of research. It establishes the context of the research being conducted by summarizing current understanding and background information about the topic, stating the purpose of the work in the form of the hypothesis, question, or research problem, briefly explaining your rationale, methodological approach, highlighting the potential outcomes your research can reveal, and describing the remaining structure of the paper.

Research articles are the most valuable tool for disseminating research results around the world. Knowledge and new information can be easily obtained by writing a research paper. However, the writing of a research article is not an easy task. Several requirements need to be fulfilled to be accepted by the publisher. Arsyad (2013) explains that research Article

Introductions (RAIs) have become an essential section of all research article sections for two significant reasons. First, since it comes first in the article where readers will read it first before reading other areas. Second, since it introduces the entire article, it will determine whether readers read different sections of the article or not. He also asserts that the article's introduction section is important because of its position and function. The introduction of a research article is also the connection between readers and the authors' work. If it can bridge the gap between the knowledge of the target readers and the research papers, it will show that the introduction is successful (Arsyad, 2013). So, the introduction must be written attractively, but the content must be complex because it is the first part that determines the reader to continue reading.

In writing, many undergraduate students experience various kinds of difficulties. Therefore, in this research, the factors that will be underlined are the factors proposed by Brown (2007) as, such as psychological factors, sociocultural factors, and linguistics factors. Factors related to the author's internal factors can also be called psychological factors. Brown (2007:153) argues that students' psychological factors can be identified from students' affective factors. Furthermore, Brown (2007:154-157) explains that affective factors - which are psychological factors that will influence students in creating good scientific article writing are a) self-esteem; b) attribution theory and self-efficacy; c) willingness to communicate; d) inhibition; e) risk-taking; f) anxiety; g) empathy; h) extroversion; i) motivation. All the psychological factors mentioned by Brown (2007) will influence a learner's decision in making research objectives, data for research, research findings, and overall research.

Culture establishes a context of cognitive and affective behavior for each person, a template for personal and social existence. But peoples tend to perceive reality within the context of their own culture, a fact that has been created and, therefore, not necessarily a reality that is empirically defined. Since language cannot be separated from culture, it is also essential to analyze the difficulties in writing research articles from the point of view of sociocultural factors. Brown (2007) said that culture becomes very important in second language learning. Therefore, the focus of sociocultural factors that will be raised in this research regarding difficulties in writing research articles is emphasized on three aspects, namely: a) social distance among each student and the relationship between students and lecturers, b) the culture in the language classroom used by students, and c) communicative competence among students and lecturers.

The linguistics factor will first consider contrasts between native and target language and the effect of the first language on a second. Brown (2007) classifies four categories to describe errors in second language learner production data. Brown's first overview is to identify the mistakes based on addition, omission, substitution, and ordering. The second category, according to Brown, for identifying errors, puts into consideration the level of the student's language (phonology, lexicon, grammar, and discourse) that should be considered. Thirdly, mistakes can also be analyzed based on global or local errors, as Brown (2007) suggested identifying errors by considering two related error dimensions, domain, and extent. Brown (2007) explains that domain is the level of linguistic units (from phonemes to discourse) that must be taken as context for the error to become apparent, and extent is the level of linguistic units that must be deleted, replaced, supplied, or re-ordered to correct the sentence.

The problems and difficulties faced by students in writing academic research reports have been an interesting issue for several previous researchers. The results of the previous research revealed that students make grammatical errors, have a lack of vocabulary and face problems in structuring and organizing sentences, ideas and paragraphs. Problems and difficulties in writing the Introduction section of research papers in various fields such as social sciences, scientific and technical fields have attracted the attention of researchers (Aprilia et al., 2020; Cheung, 2012; Diyana & Monsefi, 2017; Jovita, 2016; Khadijah, 2020). The problem also faced by STKIP PGRI Pacitan students also faced the problem, especially the fourth

semester of the English Education Study Program in the Academic Writing course. The students have difficulty in making an introduction to a research article.

Therefore, this research stands on the argument to investigate undergraduate students' difficulties in writing introductions in research articles, especially those majoring in English Education Study Program. The analysis of students' difficulties is defined as an attempt to reduce the possibility of the recurrence of students' difficulties in writing introductions in research articles. They can reflect on themselves through this research before conducting research. In addition, this analysis is also believed to be an evaluation of students' understanding and ability to conduct research which will lead to an improvement in the quality of students in the future.

From the discussion above, the researcher is interested in analyzing students' difficulties in writing introductions in research articles in the fourth-semester academic writing course titled " Undergraduate Students Difficulties in Writing Introduction for Research Articles."

## **Method**

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design. The researcher used purposive sampling. Data was taken from 33 fourth-semester students who took English Education Study Program at STKIP PGRI Pacitan. The researcher used a questionnaire with a Google Form platform to collect data. The researcher spread the data using WhatsApp. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions in the form of open-ended. The data were taken in May 2023. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the data, which included checking the completeness of the answers, coding the respondents, grouping the data, presenting the data, and drawing conclusions.

## **Findings and Discussions**

After collecting the data from a questionnaire, the researcher found several difficulties for students writing introductions in research articles. From 33 respondents obtained nine challenges faced by students, which are:

### **Determine the topic and title of the research articles**

Research topics and titles were the most important factors in research. The data collected using questionnaires found that most students had difficulty determining topics and formulating titles for writing research articles. This was evidenced by the argument of 16 respondents. "*saya kesulitan mencari bahan dalam menentukan topik dan judul artikel untuk menjadi penelitian saya*". Students must be diligent in finding information to get material for research topics. Students cannot be original in determining the topic. This was in line with respondent 8 "*saya kesulitan menentukan topik yang menarik untuk dijadikan sebuah penelitian*" and respondent 7 "*Ke-urgency-an topik yang ingin saya angkat dalam penelitian*". So that in deciding the topic to be chosen, students must make considerations first. This was one of the difficulties felt by students.

Then students also revealed that they had difficulty in composing titles for research. Students still struggle to make a correct, engaging, and valuable title. This was stated by respondent 9 "*Kesulitan saya adalah mencari diksi yang tepat untuk judul*". In line with respondent 3 "*Kesulitan saya dalam menentukan topik atau judul artikel penelitian adalah memadatkan kata dalam merancang judul untuk menghasilkan judul yang menarik, bagus, dan berbobot*". So the reason students find it challenging to determine the topic and formulate the title is that they do not find enough information to decide a particular case, choose the urgency of a matter, and choose diction in developing the title.

### **Identify and formulate a problem for research articles**

A research problem was the issue discussed in the research. A research problem can be a difficulty or conflict to be overcome, a condition to be corrected, a concern to be addressed, a troubling question, or a theoretical or practical controversy (or gap) in the scientific literature.

The research problem helps refine the topic into something that makes sense for conducting research. From the questionnaire, it was found that students had difficulty identifying and formulating problems in writing research articles. As stated by respondent 26 “*Kesulitan saya adalah kurang bisa menentukan/memilih milih apa masalah yang di hadapi dan muncul di sebuah research yang saya teliti, pastinya bukan hanya satu permasalahan saja tetapi mungkin ada beberapa masalah yang ada, dan terkadang saya bingung prioritas masalah seperti apa yang harus di indentifikasi terlebih dulu*”. From this expression, it was known that students were still confused in identifying problems in a topic. This was in line with the answer from respondent 22 “*Saya merasa kesulitan untuk mengindetifikasi atau mengkaji masalah-masalah apa dari topik yang akan saya bahas ke dalam sebuah penelitian*”. So the reason students have difficulty in determining research problems is due to prioritizing the problems to be discussed and identifying problems in a particular topic.

#### **Cite and use references in research articles**

In writing an introduction to a research article, students must be able to cite and use references properly. The questionnaire data found that students still found it difficult to cite and use references in writing introductions to research articles. This was evidenced by the answers of respondent 18 “*saya kesulitan dalam mencari referensi yang sesuai dengan tema yang akan saya bahas, saya malas untuk membaca banyak referensi saya kesulitan melakukan parafrase untuk menulis kajian literature*”. The student said it was still difficult to find references appropriate to the theme discussed. The student also said that he had difficulty paraphrasing. This was in line with the answer from respondent 6 “*kesulitan mengutip dari pendapat ahli, kesulitan menggunakan bahasa saya sendiri*”.

In addition, another student also revealed that they had difficulty finding reference sources. Respondent 6 answered that “*sumber yang terbatas, mencari teori yang sesuai dengan sesuatu yang saya bahas*”. The same thing was stated by respondent 22 that “*Kesulitan yang saya alami adalah keterbatasan sumber yang saya dapatkan yang digunakan sebagai landasan teori*”. So the reasons for students' difficulties in citing and using references in writing introductions in research articles are that they were lazy to find connections that followed the theme, had difficulty paraphrasing, and had limited reference sources.

#### **Determine the research gap in the research articles**

The introduction should outline the general area of research along with the specific focus of interest to the authors. The introduction should also outline the research gap explicitly. The questionnaire data found that students had difficulty determining the research gap in writing an introduction to a research article. This was conveyed by respondent 10 “*saya kesulitan dalam menentukan Research gap dalam penelitian saya dengan penelitian lain*”. The student had difficulty comparing his research gap with other studies. This was in line with what was conveyed by respondent 27 “*kesulitan yang saya alami yaitu dalam mencari hasil penelitian lain dan membandingkan dengan penelitian yang sedang dilakukan (menentukan gap) membuat kesimpulan dari beberapa penelitian sebelumnya.*”

There were even students who still did not understand the research gap. Respondent 14 stated that “*saya tidak tahu apa itu research gap*” The same thing was stated by respondent 2 “*saya belum paham terhadap research gap*”. This should be one of the reasons students find it challenging to determine the research gap in the student's research. So the reason for students' difficulties in determining research gaps in a writing introduction for a research article was that they had problems comparing their research with other studies, and there were still students who did not understand the research gap.

#### **Using sentence structure in research articles**

As people know, academic writing requires a logical structure and a sentence. The questionnaire results showed that students struggle with sentence structure in writing introductions for research articles. This was shown by the answer from respondent 14 that “*saya belum terlalu paham menulis struktur kalimat yang baik*”. The student said they did not

understand writing sentence structures well. This was in line with the answer from respondent 6 *“saya kesulitan membuat struktur kalimat yang baik dan benar.”*

Another reason was given by respondent 22 that *“Kesulitan saya yaitu dalam penggunaan kata depan sebuah kalimat atau kata yang digunakan untuk mengawali sebuah kalimat. Selain itu saya merasa sulit untuk mengolah kata menjadi bahasa ilmiah”*. The student revealed that in writing a sentence there were difficulties in using prepositions, words that were suitable for use in sentence prefixes and using formal diction. This was supported by the answers of respondents 9 and 10 who have similar answers that *“saya kesulitan dalam memilih kata atau vocabulary yang benar dalam menulis sebuah artikel ilmiah”*.

Students also find it difficult to ensure that the sentences they make are coherent with other sentences. This was stated by respondent 24 *“Kesulitan saya adalah memastikan adanya keterkaitan dengan kalimat sebelumnya”*. A similar answer was also given by respondent 22 *“(saya kesulitan) Menghubungkan kalimat secara koheren.”*

So the reason students have difficulty with sentence structure in writing introductions for research articles was they have not mastered sentence structure properly and correctly. Students have difficulty selecting formal vocabulary for academic writing and still have problems making coherent sentences in one paragraph.

### **Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics**

The peoples know that grammar, spelling, and writing mechanics are elements of writing. The questionnaire found that students struggle with grammar, spelling, and writing mechanics. This was stated by respondent 12 that *“saya belum terlalu paham dengan grammar, dan kadang kurang memperhatikan mekanisme penulisan”*. Here the student revealed that they did not really understand the grammar and sometimes did not pay attention to the writing mechanism. This causes the student to have difficulty with grammar and writing mechanisms. This was also stated by respondent 18 that *“saya masih belum memahami secara menyeluruh cara penggunaan grammar, kadang saya lupa memperhatikan huruf besar dan kecil”*.

In addition, students also said that they had difficulty with spelling. There were often typos that they do not realize. This was stated by respondent 25 that *“yaa, terkadang saya belum bisa menggunakan grammar, dan ejaan yang membuat artikel saya keliru dan dikritik oleh dosen”*. Respondent 27 also said the same thing that *“Kesulitan yang saya alami dalam menulis artikel yaitu pada penggunaan tata bahasa yang baku dan benar. juga sering terjadinya typo yang tidak disadari dan belum di benarkan”*

So the reason students find difficulty in grammar, spelling, and writing mechanics is because they do not understand the use of grammar and lack attention to the use of writing mechanics and spelling.

### **Motivation**

Each student has their reasons for writing and different motivations. From the questionnaire results, it was found that students have difficulty motivating themselves to write research articles. This was mentioned by respondent 18 that *“saya kesulitan dalam memotivasi diri saya sendiri untuk menulis artikel ilmiah”*. In line with answer from respondent 03 *“Kesulitan lain yang saya alami adalah kurangnya motivasi....”*

Other students also said that they think motivation in themselves was very important because motivation has a big influence on their work. Respondent 9 said *“Kesulitan lain yaitu kurangnya motivasi dalam diri. Terkadang juga saya punya ide tapi bingung cara menuangkannya dalam bentuk tulisan”*. In line with respondent 18 that *“(saya kesulitan) Motivasi: (karena) Menulis artikel penelitian membutuhkan ketekunan dan motivasi yang tinggi”*

So, motivation was one-factor influencing students in writing introductions for research articles. It was important for students to be motivated to complete their writing tasks.

## Anxiety

Although peoples know what anxiety is and have all experienced feelings of fear, pressure is still not easy to define in a simple sentence. From the questionnaire results, it was known that most students said they felt anxious when writing research articles. This was explained by respondent 4 that “*saya merasakan cemas ketika menulis sebuah artikel penelitian karena saya merasa takut salah*”. The student felt uneasy about writing the research article because they feared being wrong. This can happen because it was based on other factors of difficulty writing research articles. In line with the answer from respondent 2 “*saya kurang pede dan kadang cemas jika saya melakukan kesalahan dalam menulis sebuah artikel*”.

In addition, respondent 32 also said that “*Saya tidak percaya diri ketika membuat artikel penelitian, cemas jika isi artikel tidak sesuai dengan tema*”. Besides being afraid of making mistakes, students also lack confidence, so they feel anxious if the article does not follow the theme discussed.

So the reason why the students feel anxiety in writing introductions for research articles was because of low self-confidence and afraid of making mistakes both in writing and the suitability of the content to the theme discussed.

## Time management

Time was one of the things that cannot be changed by humans. From the questionnaire results, it was known that students also have difficulty in managing time when writing research articles. This was stated by respondent 8 that “*saya kesulitan dalam pengelolaan waktu*”. in line with the statement made by respondent 6 “*saya kesulitan mengelola waktu dan saya merasa susah ketika akan memulai menulis*” and respondent 7 “*Alokasi waktu, batas waktu*”.

Respondents' answers showed that they experience difficulties in time management. Students had to be able to manage their time well because time management greatly affected the assessment results obtained by students. If students are late in completing assignments, it will affect their grades.

## Conclusion

The difficulties students face in writing introductions for research articles have been found and discussed. Students faced Nine difficulties with different reasons in writing introductions for research articles. These difficulties were determining the topic and title of the research article, identifying and formulating the problem in the research article, citing and using references in the research article, defining the research gap in the research article, using the sentence structure in the research article, grammar, spelling & writing mechanics, motivation, anxiety, and time management. So, the nine difficulties above were experienced by fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program of STKIP PGRI Pacitan in the academic year 2022/2023 in writing introductions for research articles. Writing essays is challenging for students in English Education Study Program. Further research is suggested to find practical strategies for teaching academic writing courses.

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