

## EXPLORING STUDENTS' CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE TALENT SCOUTING PROGRAM

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to understand the students' challenges and strategies when they are joining academic writing class on talent scouting program batch 2022 of UIN Salatiga. This research employs descriptive qualitative research model by involving 25 students who joined talent scouting program batch 2022 of UIN Salatiga. The instruments used questionnaire and interviews in order to obtain the data. The data were analyzed and interpreted through qualitative procedure. The research finds that the students face challenges; lack of vocabularies, grammar mastery, choosing correct words, motivation, and presenting clear idea. Writing weakness and negative environment are also part of the issues. The findings also showed the students' strategies to confront those challenges such as the social strategies, memory strategy, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategy, and affective strategies. From the result, it can be concluded that students from different majors joining the academic writing class were struggled to learn and meet the requirement of academic writing, so they are advised to allocate more time in self-regulated learning outside of the classes.

**Keywords:** Academic writing, Challenges, Strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

Language has the function of linking social communication and interactions between humans. As social beings, humans will not escape from relating to other people. Bloomfield (1914) states that language is expressive movements affected by emotions that improve over time and social interchange. The language uses conventional signs, sounds, gestures, or marks to communicate people's ideas or feelings. To communicate with others, people can use speaking or writing. According to Barret (2006), communication is the transfer of information from one person to another or a group of people. Humans should learn how to speak and write well to establish good communication.

Brown (2000) explained writing has some types, which can be fiction, non-fiction, letters, and academic writing. writing is a type of problem-solving that involves processes such as raising ideas, planning, setting goals, monitoring and assessing what is to be written and what has been written, and finding a vocabulary to use to give accurate meaning (White and Arndt,1991). Academic writing requires the writer to be clear about why they are writing (Bailey, 2011). According to Hogue & Oshima (2007), Academic writing is the kind of writing used in high school or college classes. Whitaker (2009) says that in an academic writing

assignment, we will start by asking a good question, then find and analyze the answer, and choose the best answer to discuss in our paper. Academic writing is necessary for students to master the English language and to be able to learn other disciplines where English is language instruction (Alharbi, 2019).

From the previous study the challenges experienced by Saudi Arabian students at one New Zealand university points out three primary difficulties that students face: academic writing style and a lack of vocabulary, especially academic writing vocabulary, difficulties paraphrasing and summarizing articles, and difficulties finding references correctly and identifying relevant articles (Ankawi, 2015). Bian and Wang (2016), finds that the fourth similarly identified process-related challenges: 1) limiting the topic, 2) constructing effective paragraphs, 3) constructing a logical sequence of ideas, and 4) appropriately using coherent devices.

This research will identify the challenges and strategies in academic writing class on the talent scouting program. The researcher chose the students in the talent scouting program batch 2022 as research subjects. Talent Scouting is a program managed by UPTPB UIN Salatiga. This program is designed to explore students' talent and strengthen students' intellectual capacity to compete nationally and internationally. UPTPB sees that as academics, students must have good language skills, especially writing skills. In order to improve students' writing skills, UPTPB created Go Skillful class on talent scouting program, this class teaches students skills in both English language and Arabic language. In Go Skillful class there is a writing class. This class focuses on teaching students to write in academic form. This academic writing class was created because UPTPB also realizes that as students they must also have the ability to write academically. In the Talent Scouting program, challenges may be experienced often by the students when they join an academic writing class. As a foreign language, talent scouting students face difficulties to write in academic or formal form. The difficulties become worse and inhibits students' academic writing abilities. Overcoming the problem of challenges, the talent scouting students also may have a strategy to anticipate their challenges. Students have to know their strategies for learning academic writing. the researcher intends to achieve several objectives through research; first, to know students' challenges when they are joining academic writing class on talent scouting program of UIN Salatiga. Second, to know students' strategies in joining the academic class on talent scouting program of UIN Salatiga.

## **METHODS**

The method used for this research is descriptive qualitative with the main goal to get the current understanding of the challenges and strategies in joining academic writing class. Qualitative research is a method of investigating and comprehending the significance associated with social or human issues in persons or groups (Creswell, 2009). According to Sugiyono (2010), qualitative research is a research method based on post positivism's philosophy, used to investigate the conditions of natural objects, where the researcher is a key instrument, data collection techniques by triangulation, inductive or qualitative data analysis, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. This research uses qualitative methods using natural settings to describe factual phenomena.

Bryman (2016), argue that the respondents have a vital role in qualitative research as the source of the data used by researchers to address their research questions. The subject of this research is talent scouting students' batch 2022. It consists of 25 students as respondents. The respondents come from diverse educational backgrounds. They comprise students from various faculties and departments, including the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Faculty of Da'wah, Faculty of Law, and others. This diversity ensures that the respondents have distinct perspectives and a wide range of experiences related to academic writing. The study's findings will be more representative and contribute significantly to understanding the issues related to student challenges and strategies in academic writing

class. The data collection was done by conducting filling questionnaires and interviewing students at Talent Scouting Program.

The research data was obtained from the students' responses to the questionnaire given related to students' challenges and strategies in academic writing class on talent scouting program. The questionnaires, consisting of 14 indicators, were divided into two main parts. The first section included 14 Likert items related to students' challenges in academic writing class. The second part consisted of 12 linked items investigated students' strategies in academic writing class. The researcher used a four-point Likert scale ranging from 4 for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for disagree, and 1 for strongly disagree.

Interview being the next instrument. An interview is a conversation with a specific purpose carried out by the interviewer and interviewee (Moleong, 2000). The researcher uses the interview method to give respondents an opportunity to explain their responses and add anything not covered in the questionnaire. The purpose of the interview was explained before the interview began. The respondents consisted of 5 students selected from a total of 25 students. They were chosen as representatives of the entire student population involved in the study. Therefore, the interview results can be considered as a general representation of the students' views and experiences in the context being investigated.

Having collected the data, then the researcher uses a qualitative descriptive method and separated the operations of data analysis into three categories: data reduction, data presentation, and generating conclusions (Usman and Akbar, 2019). The collected data were analysed and processed to find out the result of the research.

In this study, the researcher uses methodology triangulation to decide the validity of the data. Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, and qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Creswell, 2014). The researcher analyzes the data with the following process organizing, grouping or categorizing, interpreting, and looking for correlation within data. After analyzing the data, the researcher presented it in a descriptive paragraph. In an attempt to dialogue between research interpretation theories, researchers have to provide reasons and references when conducting analysis

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Students Challenges in Academic Writing**

Writing skill, it is a difficult process faced by learners who learn English as Foreign Language (EFL) (Qasem and Zayid, 2019). The Writers should be clear about why they are writing (Bailey, 2011). Fitriyanti (2021), writing could be an ability that expresses a thought, feeling, and thought which are systematized in words, sentences, and sections. The goal of academic writing is to show that we understand and can think critically about the topics. Challenges may face by students in achieving their goals (Flower and Hayes, 1981).

In this section, the researcher presents the result of the research and discussing the data. The answer of 14 items in the questionnaire which cover seven of challenges in academic writing: lack of vocabularies, grammar mastery, writing weakness, negative environment, lack of motivation, choosing correct words, and presenting clear ideas were analyzed, and these the frequencies in the parentheses can represent each indicator.

#### ***Lack of vocabularies***

The result of questionnaire shows that 88% students they faced challenges in writing due to lack of vocabularies and this case affected the quality of their writing and the feedback they received on their written work. When the students have limited vocabulary, they struggle to find the right words to convey their intended meaning, and it can limit the ability to express oneself effectively.

Based on data gained using the interviews, there were various responses regarding students' opinion about the lack of vocabularies. Almost all students often face challenges when writing due to a lack of vocabularies which also affects students writing, resulting in a decrease in the quality of their writing. Based on the result of the analysis, the researcher concludes lack of vocabulary became challenges for the students and affected their writing ability. As stated by Stokoe (2020), lack of vocabulary became a crucial problem for writers.

### ***Lack of grammar mastery***

One of the challenges for the students in academic writing is lack of grammar mastery, almost all (the questionnaire showed 80%) students of talent scouting program batch 2022 faced challenges due the lack of grammar mastery. Regrading grammar mastery, from the interview the students often encountered challenges due to lack of mastery in grammar. This case be struggle for the students because they faced difficulties to construct good writing, compose and write effective sentences with correct grammar.

Grammar is helpful in writing; it can determine how paragraphs build-up and the ideas can be understandable. Lack of grammar mastery can make the writing difficult to understand and reduce the credibility of the writer (Thurman, 2003). Based on the discussion, the data obtained through questionnaire and interviews have the same points, where the students of talent scouting program batch 2022 tend faced challenges due to lack of grammar mastery.

### ***Writing weakness***

Based on the documented results of questionnaire, 80% of the talent scouting students faced a weakness in their academic writing skills, it is evident that a significant number of students acknowledged facing weaknesses in their academic writing skills. These situations have a significant impact on their confidence in writing, as they feel weak due to this limitation. There ae several issues faced by the students, such as lack of vocabulary, difficult to connect between sentences, finding ideas, laziness in reading references, weakness in composing written pieces, struggling with sentence connections, and difficulties in generating ideas. The students faced laziness to read references, difficulties when trying to connect sentences, and struggle were finding ideas for writing These responses collectively demonstrate that the challenges faced by students give an impact on their confidence in writing. As Zinsser (2016), stated that the issues in writing can be the writer weakness.

### ***Negative environment***

Environment has a special role it can impact the ability of the students. The questionnaire results indicate that the environment has a significant influence on the students' writing abilities. All of the students of talent scouting program batch 2022, 100% agree that learning environment has an effect on their ability to write, it be difficult when trying to write in a negative environment. The environment significantly influences students' writing abilities, from the interview the researcher got some reasons; if the environment is noisy or uncomfortable, the students cannot focus and they cannot write because lost their motivation, and their writing is disturbed and cannot optimal. These indicates a negative environment is a challenge for the students and can make it difficult for the students to produce quality work, as stated by Silva (2007), the learning environment can impact the writers' focus, think creatively, and the writers' motivation

### ***Lack of motivation***

One of the factors influence the quality of written work is motivation. Lack of motivation also experienced by the students of the talent scouting program batch 2022. From the data obtained by the questionnaire, 80% of the students experienced a lack of motivation, when it comes to writing, they find out that lack of motivation can impacts the quality or frequency of their writing work.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the results of the interviews also indicate that students are challenged by a lack of motivation and this impacts their writing, there are several factors that contribute to students experiencing a lack of motivation, including not having a target, mood, related to the topic, and environment and time management. Boice (1990) argue that lack of motivation can be challenge for the writers. The result of this research highlights the importance of addressing the issue of motivation in writing, as it has a significant role in influencing the quality and productivity of students' written work.

#### ***Lack of choosing correct words***

The researcher conclude that a significant percentage of students face challenges in choosing the correct words while writing. From the questionnaire data, 80% of the students they struggle with selecting the right words. The interview provided further insight into the students' experiences, were students mentioned difficulties due to lack of choosing correct words such as not being familiar with words related to the topic, struggle with choosing appropriate conjunctions and using words in the right context.

These findings highlighted the crucial of vocabulary in writing and the varying experiences students have when it comes to selecting the appropriate words. Choosing correct words required a strong understanding of the nuances of the language and the ability to match the language to the intended readers and the purposes of the writing (Strunk and White, 2009). When the writer chooses, incorrect words can lead to confusion, and ambiguity, which can impact the effectiveness of the writing.

#### ***Lack of presenting clear idea***

The results of the questionnaire indicate that a significant percentage of participants face challenges in presenting clear ideas in their writing. Out of the respondents, 64% of the students they faced struggle to present a clear idea while write in academic form and the students have reasons about why they struggle with presenting clear ideas. Based on the data from the interview, there are some reasons for challenges in presenting ideas, such as lack of maturity in the ideas being discussed, emphasizing the importance of reading and discussing relevant references and further developing the ideas, how to start to write, and how to make the writing work understandable.

Presenting ideas requires the ability to organize thoughts and communicate them effectively. The researcher highlighted the importance of making the writing understandable to a wide audience and presenting idea clearly, suggesting that the struggle lies in effectively communicating their thoughts to readers. When the writer cannot present their idea clearly, it can make difficult for the readers to follow the writer's logic (Williams and Colomb, 2010).

#### **Students Strategies in Academic Writing**

Language learning strategies have an important role in students' writing ability (Pongsukvajchaku, 2021). Strategies expected can help the students in their learning process as well in learning writing, it can help writers to overcome their challenges and improve their skills. Strategies are defined as the processes that the writers choose and of which they are aware (Chien, 2012). Lee (2010) mentions several factors that influence students applying learning strategies. There are four factors influencing students in selecting writing strategies: students' factors, situational factors, academic factors, and cultural background (Gestanti, 2017).

Yulianti (2018) conducted research to investigate learning strategies in writing. The strategies are divided into two major classes: direct strategies and indirect strategies. The six categories of the strategies are social strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and affective strategies (Oxford, 1990). According to Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995), Oxford (2003), Hismanoglu (2000), and Pongsukvajchakul (2021), language learning strategies can be applied to learning writing strategies categorized into six groups as explained before.

In this section, the researchers attempt to present the result of exploring learning strategies in academic writing employed by students of the talent scouting program batch 2022 of UIN Salatiga. The data gained using the questionnaire, consisting of 12 items that cover the six learning strategies were analyzed, those are social strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, affective strategies, and the discussion can represent each category.

### ***Social Strategies***

Language is a form of behavior, so the learning environment has a relationship with social strategies because social strategies help the students to interact with others. The questionnaire data showed that 88% students used social strategies in academic writing. This indicates that students recognize the importance of collaboration and seeking help from their peers in improving their writing skills.

Social strategies are essential in academic writing as they facilitate interaction and collaboration among students. This aligns with the theory of Social Constructivism, which emphasizes the role of social interactions in shaping knowledge and learning. The use of social strategies by students to improve their writing skills also supports the Collaborative Learning Theory, which highlights the benefits of collaborative learning environments in enhancing academic performance. Social strategies help the students to interact with other, the interview results show that the students collaborate and seek help from their friends in practicing writing and finding supportive environments. As mentioned by respondent 1, that having target-oriented writing communities or groups where they write together, and exchange ideas can help them to improve each other's writing. The students are proactive in seeking assistance and creating a supportive environment to overcome language difficulties, they have willingness to seek clarification and ensure comprehension when faced with language barriers. The analysis provided that students acknowledge poses the challenges and actively engage in collaborative practices and seeking help from others to overcome these challenges.

### ***Memory Strategies***

Memory strategies help the students on memorizing information. The significant percentage of students recognize the importance of memory strategies shown by the result of the questionnaire, there are 80% of the students have their memory strategies. From the interviews, respondents mentioned various methods due to memory strategies. Component of memory strategies used by students in academic writing are 1) Repetition, some students mentioning the practice of repeating words repeatedly, writing them several times, and reading and reciting them repeatedly. These strategies were acknowledged to have a positive impact on their writing skills. 2) Watching movies, students watch the movies with English subtitles and pausing the video to take screenshots of new words and rewriting the words as helpful strategy. 3) Using a dictionary, students use a dictionary to look up words meanings and memorize them. Memory strategies, such as repetition, watching movies, and using dictionaries, are employed by students to memorize information. This is consistent with the Information Processing Theory, which posits that learning involves the processing and storage of information in memory (Abbas, 2015).

The analysis of the data highlights the challenges faced by students and the strategies they employ to overcome their limitation, emphasizing the importance of developing vocabularies for effective writing.

### ***Compensatory Strategies***

The students face difficulties related to their difficulties in writing and the students of talent scouting program batch 2022 has different compensatory strategies. The compensatory strategies help students to use the target language for overcoming knowledge gaps such as using synonyms, guessing, and creating new words.

The result from the questionnaire reveals that a significant percentage of the students they found difficulties with writing in English. However, 88% almost all of the students they have their own strategies with their challenges during writing in English. The students face challenges such as cannot think of a word while writing and did not understand with some unfamiliar words. From the data obtained by the interview, the researcher found what are the strategies employed by the students. Overcoming the language barriers, the students use various strategies such as rely on tools like Google translate to help find the meaning of words, use some of existing vocabulary to explain the desired word with the context, and find the meaning of words that they did not know on dictionary. Compensatory strategies, such as using synonyms, guessing, and creating new words, help students overcome knowledge gaps. This is in line with the Compensatory Theory, which suggests that individuals use alternative strategies to compensate for their limitations (Mestari, 2016).

### ***Metacognitive Strategies***

Metacognitive Strategies help the students to improve their awareness of their thinking processes. The metacognitive strategies help the students to enable to control their own cognition. These strategies help to regulate the learning process such as planning, practicing, evaluating, and monitoring.

The data based on the questionnaire reveals that all of the students agreed that their metacognitive strategies helped them to improve their writing ability. The students have their own effective strategies and they have a clear goal for improving their skills with the strategies. Based on the result of interview, the metacognitive strategies to improve writing ability employed by students primarily involve practice and reading. They believe that practicing writing more frequently be an effective method for developing their writing skills. The student also mentions that creating plan, reading extensively, and discussion are importance and be their strategies for improvement. Metacognitive strategies, such as planning, practicing, evaluating, and monitoring, help students improve their awareness of their thinking processes. This aligns with the Metacognitive Theory, which posits that metacognitive awareness is essential for effective learning and problem-solving (Mestari, 2016).

### ***Cognitive Strategies***

Cognitive Strategies used by the students to make sense of their learning process by involving conscious ways of handling the target language include reasoning, summarizing, analyzing, writing words several times, writing some notes, and using words in different cases. The data from the questionnaire showed that 80% of the students have strategies to make sense on their learning writing and they can determine which strategies to use in writing.

The interviews were conducted, the researcher gain several strategies were mentioned by the students. According to the result of interview, these cognitive strategies highlight the students' approaches to overcome challenges and improve their writing skills, such as organizing ideas, managing time effectively, seeking inspiration from existing writings, and creating a conducive environment for learning. Cognitive strategies, such as reasoning, summarizing, analyzing, and organizing ideas, help students make sense of their learning process. This is consistent with the Cognitive Theory, which posits that learning involves the construction of mental representations and the use of cognitive processes to process information (Abbas, 2015).

### ***Affective Strategies***

Affective strategies employed by the students to manage their motivation and their emotions. The functions of this strategy are for having confidence and lowering anxiety, encouraging oneself, expressing feelings, and rewarding oneself. Based on the documentation of the questionnaire, it can be concluded that a majority of students know their strategies to be confident in writing and they can manage their emotions while facing challenges in writing.

From the interview were conducted, the result provides that when facing challenges, students employ various strategies to manage their emotions and motivation. These strategies include remembering their goals, providing self-motivation, giving themselves positive perceptions, taking breaks to breathe and find more references, and write calmly and enjoying the process. The students also have their own ways to feel confident in their writing works, such as sticking to the theme, continuous practice, and believing in their abilities. All of the strategies contribute to their overall approach in overcoming challenges and improving their writing skills. Affective strategies, such as managing motivation and emotions, help students maintain confidence and lower anxiety. This aligns with the Affective Theory, which posits that emotions play a crucial role in shaping motivation and learning outcomes (Abbas, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explore what are the students' challenges and strategies in joining academic writing class on talent scouting program batch 2022. The findings reveal that the students faced challenges in joining academic writing class, such as lack of vocabularies, grammar mastery, writing weakness, negative environment, lack of motivation, choosing correct words, and presenting clear ideas. Furthermore, they also have several preferable strategies in joining academic writing class, such as social strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and affective strategies.

This research encompasses a comprehensive examination of the student's experiences and approaches to academic writing, providing valuable insights into the complexities of the learning process, this study provides valuable insights into the challenges and strategies encountered by students in academic writing classes. Addressing these challenges and incorporating effective strategies can contribute to the improvement of students' academic writing skills and overall learning experience.

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