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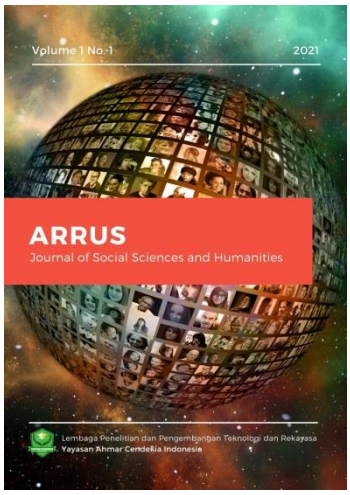

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Challenges of New Students of *Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM)* in Essay Writing

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Abstract: This research investigates the challenges faced by new students of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM) in writing essays. Writing is a complex skill that involves the organization of ideas, proper use of grammar, and clarity of expression. New students often struggle with various aspects of essay writing, which can hinder their academic progress. The study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on 142 students from the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. Data was collected through interviews and analyzed descriptively. The findings reveal several key challenges that students encounter when writing essays. These include difficulties with English grammar, low vocabulary, challenges organizing ideas, and issues expressing thoughts clearly. Additionally, students face non-technical obstacles such as a lack of confidence, poor time management, and the physical strain of writing. The study highlights that the essay writing process is multifaceted, requiring not only technical skills but also critical thinking and self-management abilities. Understanding these challenges provides valuable insights for educators in designing more effective teaching strategies. By addressing both the technical and psychological barriers to writing, lecturers can help students improve their essay-writing skills and better prepare them for higher academic demands. The research emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive approach to teaching writing, one that considers the diverse challenges faced by students and aims to enhance their overall academic performance.

Keywords: Challenges, New Students, Writing, Essay.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in our lives. We must be aware of this, especially by language teachers in particular and teachers in general fields of study. In their daily tasks, language teachers must understand that the ultimate goal of language teaching is for students to be skilled in language, skilled in listening, skilled in reading, skilled in speaking, and skilled in writing. (Tarigan, 1986: 2).

Language is divided into two types, namely written language and spoken language. Both spoken and written language is the most effective means of communication in social interactions when compared to other means.

Language in written form requires careful research in grammar and sentence structure. Because the advantages and disadvantages of writing will be seen very clearly (Nafiah, 1981:5)

If we use written language, then we assume that the person we are speaking to is not in front of us. As a result, the language used needs to be clearer and clearer in meaning. Because

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gestures accompany this language, glances or nods as a sign of affirmation on the part of the speaker or understanding on the part of the listener. That is why written sentences must be more careful. (Alwi, et al., 2000:7)

Developing writing skills involves many types of competencies and skills in using linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse structures. Research on written discourse has focused on issues such as error correction, composition strategies, and the role of the teacher in the research process. Teachers can make students more aware of their writing strategies by providing writing activities with a variety of different purposes. Through writing skills, students can see their ability to understand the rules of sentence construction, gain knowledge and experience, and use language well and correctly.

The growing attention and teaching of writing as an important means of receiving communication can be seen in some writing teaching literature. However, the best way to write remains forgotten and neglected.

General factors should not be forgotten, for example: intelligence, memory, and speed of understanding that students possess because this can influence students' writing skills. With the availability of supporting facilities from the school concerned, it is easier for students to practice writing using these facilities and have higher motivation for teaching writing.

Based on the description above, it is necessary to pay close attention to the current level of writing ability of new students and the challenges they face. Therefore, this research needs to be carried out with the following focus: "Essay Writing Challenges for New Students of UNM English Language Education."

2. Literature Review

2.1. Writing

Writing is deriving, imitating, or depicting graphic symbols that describe a language that is understood by someone, so that other people can read the graphic symbols can understand the language and graphic images (Tarigan, 1985: 2). This is in line with Abdurrahman and Waluyo (2000: 23) that writing is a visual depiction of thoughts, feelings, and ideas using written language for communication purposes or conveying certain messages.

Having the ability to write certainly allows humans to communicate ideas, appreciation, and experiences to other people. This writing ability is acquired through intensive training and guidance which must be taught in elementary school.

The definition of writing was also put forward by Suparno and Yunus (2007: 4) "Writing is the activity of conveying messages using writing as a medium".

Thus, it is clear that writing and painting graphic symbols are very different. According to Tarigan (1985: 24): A person who writes does not only describe the graphic symbols of a particular language but that person must understand the meaning of these graphic symbols. Meanwhile, people who depict graphic symbols are not required to understand the meaning of the graphic symbols they depict, because paintings are not for other people to read but for their beauty to be enjoyed.

Writing can be said to be a process of thinking and expressing those thoughts in the form of an essay. According to Hernowo, writing is giving birth to feelings or thoughts through writing. Thus, writing is a series of activities to express opinions or ideas in the form of written language symbols so that they can be read by other people. Writing requires complexity of activities to compose an essay well because it involves an orderly way of thinking and various requirements related to writing techniques. These requirements are: (1) the existence of unity of ideas; (2) the use of clear sentences; (3) the paragraphs are well structured; (4) the application of correct spelling rules; (5) adequate vocabulary mastery. Based on the description above, writing can be defined as a series of complex activity

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processes that require stages and put them into written form so that readers can understand the content of the ideas conveyed.

Abdurrahman and Waluyo (2000: 223) state that "the aim of writing for elementary school students is to copy, take notes and do most of the tasks given at school in the hope of practicing language skills well". Graves (in Akhadia, 1991: 14-15) states that by mastering writing skills, students can: (1) increase their intelligence, (2) develop initiative and creative power, (3) foster courage and (4) encourage children's motivation to search and find information.

From the several writing objectives above, it can be seen that writing is one of the skills that elementary school children absolutely must have, after listening and speaking skills. Syafe'ie (1989: 256) states that reading and writing abilities and skills must be immediately mastered by students because these abilities and skills are directly related to all teaching and learning process activities in elementary schools.

Writing can be viewed as a flexible series of activities. A flexible series of activities means pre-writing, drafting, editing revisions, and publication or discussion. Children's development in beginning writing also occurs slowly, at this stage children need to receive guidance in understanding and mastering how to transfer thoughts into writing.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that by writing, we can recognize the personal potential that exists within us. The writer will understand to what extent the knowledge is mastered about the topic to be written. To further strengthen the results of their writing, the writer must be able to increase their understanding and knowledge of the topic they want to write about.

Writing a simple essay is required to fulfill several basic requirements which are almost the same as when we want to write a complex essay. Simple writing requires choosing a topic, limiting it, developing ideas, presenting them in logically arranged paragraphs or sentences, and so on. However, the ability to write is not only possessed by talented people. The ability to write can be possessed by everyone who is serious about practicing and intends to express their ideas in written form.

2.2. Essay Writing

Writing essays is a normal thing for students. In the world of lectures, essays are classified as scientific papers that are often written. It is not uncommon for lecturers to give essay writing assignments. Moreover, there are usually many essay writing competitions for students. This article will help you write easy essays and examples.

Essays are different from other types of scientific writing such as papers, research reports, theses, theses or dissertations. Essays have their structure and rules.

For anyone who is still confused, here is an explanation of essays. Even if you can't write an essay properly, here's how to write a complete essay that is easy for beginners to follow.

In short, an essay or essay according to Dalman is the author's opinion on a particular subject. According to Wijayanti et al., an essay is an essay or writing that conveys events that occur in society or the environment in the form of facts or experiences. The nature of an essay is argumentative and subjective because its content can contain the author's opinion.

Another opinion was expressed by Widyamartaya, et al in Yanma Hidayah. An essay is seen as an attempt to present a view on a topic in a short form and in the best way possible. The most important point in an essay is not what is talked about, but how to talk about it (explain it).

So, an essay in the definition above is a short piece of writing about a certain subject which is usually written by students. Often essays describe the author's views or opinions about the topic discussed.

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The characteristics of a good essay include: Prose writing (exposition) written some of paragraphs. An essay is neither poetry nor fictional prose; Compared to other types of scientific writing, essays are not too long. It could be said to be relatively short. However, the content is concise and clear. The issues or topics studied are generally interesting, important, and frequently discussed; Be subjective about actual problems using analysis, interpretation and reflection; The writing style can be formal or informal with the author's distinctive style according to the author's writing character; Contains the author's opinions, views, thoughts, attitudes and stance based on facts, sharpness of ideas and strength of argumentation; It has three general structures, namely introduction, body and conclusion.

2. 3. The Challenges in Writing

Students are still not ready to write an essay, determine ideas based on the theme to be described and students are still confused and need to be given examples first to open students' thinking. Students do not write in rough form the ideas they have first. Therefore, students sometimes forget to express their ideas in the form of words/sentences. The ideas compiled by students are still classified as less organized because the ideas that are arranged into words/sentences are still less related between one word/sentence and the next word/sentence. Most students are reluctant to revise or add new ideas to their work. In other words, students are poor in words.

Students still find it difficult to express what needs to be written and are confused about where to start and what they are going to write without paying attention to spelling, capital letters, and sentence sequence. The research results of Purbania, Rohmadi, and Setiawan (2020:70) explain that the difficulties faced by students in writing descriptive essays are difficulty in expressing ideas, developing words into sentences, determining good and correct spelling; and concentration in learning.10

So, it can be concluded that the obstacles faced, namely students' understanding, are difficulties in developing ideas into writing, writing appropriately according to PUEBI, and lack of interest in learning. Apart from that, the teacher factor is also very influential, namely the teacher does not use a learning model that attracts students to get used to writing, so that students rarely do composing exercises, and are confused when developing the words and paragraphs in the essay.

In general, in every teaching process, there are bound to be several obstacles experienced by teachers. Especially in teaching writing descriptive essays, there are several obstacles experienced by teachers. Even though they encounter obstacles in teaching, teachers try to find and think of ways to overcome the obstacles they experience. This is a challenge for teachers to continue to practice and improve the quality of teaching to be able to overcome these obstacles. In writing descriptive essays, teachers acknowledge that there are obstacles that students usually face. They have difficulty putting their ideas into words and arranging them into sentences. Teachers also find it difficult to open students' minds to express ideas that already exist in students' minds into words/sentences. This results in a lack of words arranged into an essay. Thus, teachers are required to be able to overcome the low demand for reading, namely by providing interesting discourse so that students are motivated to enjoy reading, and students get used to practicing seriously in writing essays so that they can arrange words and develop sentences.

3. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative research approach. Qualitative Design is a qualitative research design that attempts to describe and interpret objects according to reality. The descriptive method was implemented because data analysis was presented descriptively and findings were collected in written and not numerical format. This research was carried out by conducting interviews with students in the Essay Writing course.

The subjects of this research were new students of the English Education Study Program, Department of English, second semester because in that semester there was an Essay Writing

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course. Where this research analyzes the challenges that students face in writing essays, namely new students of the English Language Education Study Program. Students in the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year who take this course consist of 7 classes with a total of 270 students. The subjects of this research focus on 4 classes, namely classes D, E, F, and G which consist of 142 students. Qualitative data from interviews was collected and analyzed interactively as can be adapted from Miles and Huberman. Data was collected and then analyzed. The results of the analysis are then presented and concluded. Furthermore, the temporary conclusions obtained are verified or supplemented with other evidence found through subsequent data collection activities.

4. Results and Discussions

Based on the results of data collection and analysis that was carried out on 142 students who took the Essay Writing course in the English Education Study Program, data was found from the third question regarding the challenges that students encountered in writing essays, "Explain the challenges that new UNM English Language Education students face in writing essays?"

The challenges for new students in essay writing include:

a. Complicated English grammar = G1, G4, G9, G10, G11, G16, G19, G23, G24, G26, G32, G34, F2, F4, F8, F10, G37, F11, F13, F14, F17, F20, F22, F25, F28, F30, G41, D6, D7, D9, D12, D17, D24, D30, E5, E6, E8, E10, E11, E13, E14, E19, E22, E24, E25, E26, E32, E35.
b. No examples available = G2
c. Low vocabulary = G3, G4, G9, G10, G18, G23, G24, F1, G29, G30, G31, F9, F29, F30, F31, D1, D4, D17, D22, D27, D29, E2, E4, E5 , E22.
d. Low English proficiency = G3, G27, F9, F30, D2, D5, D13, E5, E21.
e. Focus on topic = G5, G6, G14, F1, G30, G31, G34, G35, F6, F7, G37, F13, F16, F17, F19, F21, F23, F26, F27, F32, G41, D9, D10, D14, D15, D16, D28, D29, E7, E13, E14, E15, E16, E20, E24, E26, E30, D34.
f. Idea organization = G6, G28, G33, F2, F6, D8, D21, E13, E15, E24, E25, E26, D34.
g. Untidy = G7, G39.
h. Speaking English = G8, E6, E10.
i. Critical thinking = G13, G19, E31.
j. Word selection = G13, G16, G31, G34, E16, E20, E24.
k. Source search = G14, G33, F1, F6, F27, F32, D16, E26, D34.
l. Proper expression of ideas = G15, E2, E12, E15, E24.
m. Correct placement of symbols/punctuation = G17, D11, D12.
n. Argumentation = G19, F6, D16.
o. Proofreading/ rechecking = G19, E1.
p. Lack of confidence = G19
q. Translating word by word = G19, G21, G22, G23, G25, G27, G36, D2, D31.
r. Material exploration = G20, F16, E15, E31.
s. Punctuation = G29, F8, F10, F27, D6, D12, D22, E8, E17, E32, E34.
t. Hard to start = G31, E9, E12, E13.
u. Time management = G33, D32, D33, E15, E26, D34.
v. Language styles = G34, F18, F30, E8.
w. Plagiarism = G35, F13
x. Paragraph placement = F3
y. Expression in writing = F5
z. Analysis ability = F6
aa. Use of capital letters = F8, D12, E34.
bb. Hand pain/physical = F12, G40, D9, D26, E23, E27.
cc. Cell phone use = F12
dd. Reading comprehension = F15

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ee. Sentence development = F17, F19, F27.
ff. Providing questions = G38
gg. Confidence = G38
hh. Comprehension = F24
ii. Learning system = D3
jj. Language feature = D7
kk. No problems = D18, E18, E33.
ll. Text type = D19, E27, E34.
mm. Linguistic/language rules = D20, D23, D25.
nn. Consistent = D30
oo. Poor handwriting = E3, E28, E29, E34, E35.
pp. Writing format problem = E14

The challenges faced by students in writing essays are quite varied, ranging from technical aspects such as complicated English grammar, and low vocabulary, to non-technical aspects such as lack of self-confidence and time management. This challenge reflects the complexity of the essay writing process, which not only requires an understanding of the structure and rules of writing but also critical thinking skills and good self-management (Atmowardoyo, 2021). For example, difficulties in organizing ideas and placing symbols/punctuation correctly are common challenges often faced by novice writers, as stated by some theories in essay writing which emphasize the importance of planning and preparing an outline before starting to write.

The results of this research provide important insights for educators in designing more effective learning strategies. By understanding the abilities and challenges new students face, lecturers can develop teaching methods that not only focus on improving technical writing skills but also help students overcome psychological and cognitive barriers that may prevent them from producing quality essays (Sakkir, 2018). It is hoped that the integration of this comprehensive approach can improve students' overall essay-writing abilities so that they are better prepared to face higher academic demands in the future.

5. Conclusion

The challenges that new UNM English Language Education students face in writing various essays include complicated English grammar; No examples available; Low vocabulary; Low English proficiency; Focus on the topic; Organization of ideas; Choice of words; Source search; Expressing the right ideas; Correct placement of symbols/punctuation; Proofreading/ double checking; Lack of self-confidence; Translate word by word; Punctuation; It's hard to get started; Time management; Language style; Plagiarism; Paragraph placement; Expression in writing; Analytical skills; Use of capital letters; to physical problems, hand injury or illness.

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