



The Students' Difficulties in Essay Writing during Pandemic Covid- 19 in English Language Education of Universitas Islam Riau

Arimuliani Ahmad¹, Fitria Andriani², Maya Yova Dita Mulyani³, Rahma Sarita⁴, and Rahmah Hazimah Anita⁵

Universitas Islam Riau^{1,2,3,4,5}

arimulianiahmad@edu.uir.ac.id¹; fitriaandriani@student.uir.ac.id²;

mayayovaditamulyani@student.uir.ac.id³; rahmasarita@student.uir.ac.id⁴;

rahmahazimahanita@student.uir.ac.id⁵

ABSTRACT

Online learning during the Covid-19 era requires educators to be creative in compiling interesting learning materials so that students can study the material well and not get bored while learning. But in reality, some of the problems faced by some students, especially those in semester 4th of the English department at the Universitas Islam Riau Riau who have been online since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, have difficulty when they are writing an essay. The sample of this research is the English Language Education student in Universitas Islam Riau, which consist of 34 fourth semester students. This was investigation design which mainly analyzes quantitative data via a distributed web-based questionnaire provided as numerical data on graphics and charts. This questionnaire was based on Ceylan's (2019) questionnaire which focus on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The majority of online learning aspects are connected to distance and time flexibility, student and instructor interaction, and many aspects that online learning shares with distant education. As a result, online learning may not even be ready to serve all disciplines in the same way, and that not all online learning platforms are the same. The student lacked the opportunity to practice academic writing skills and produce a solid essay product. As a result, students must practice writing as often as possible in order to produce a well-written essay. Cognitive difficulties are now defined as difficulties in the categories of writing perspective, transferring language, and writing process.

KEYWORDS

English Education; writing essay; students' difficulties

ABSTRAK

Pembelajaran online di era Covid-19 menuntut pendidik untuk kreatif menyusun materi pembelajaran yang menarik agar siswa dapat mempelajari materi dengan baik dan tidak bosan saat belajar. Namun pada kenyataannya beberapa permasalahan yang dihadapi oleh sebagian mahasiswa khususnya mahasiswa semester 4 jurusan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Islam Riau Riau yang telah online sejak awal

KATA KUNCI

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pandemi COVID-19 pada tahun 2020 mengalami kesulitan saat mereka menulis. sebuah esai. Sampel penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Islam Riau yang berjumlah 34 mahasiswa semester IV. Ini adalah desain investigasi yang terutama menganalisis data kuantitatif melalui kuesioner berbasis web yang didistribusikan sebagai data numerik pada grafik dan grafik. Kuesioner ini didasarkan pada kuesioner Ceylan (2019) yang berfokus pada pengetahuan, sikap, dan perilaku. Mayoritas aspek pembelajaran online terkait dengan fleksibilitas jarak dan waktu, interaksi siswa dan instruktur, dan banyak aspek yang dibagikan pembelajaran online dengan pendidikan jarak jauh. Akibatnya, pembelajaran online bahkan mungkin tidak siap untuk melayani semua disiplin ilmu dengan cara yang sama, dan tidak semua platform pembelajaran online sama. siswa tidak memiliki kesempatan untuk melatih keterampilan menulis akademik dan menghasilkan produk esai yang solid. Akibatnya, siswa harus berlatih menulis sesering mungkin untuk menghasilkan esai yang ditulis dengan baik. Kesulitan kognitif sekarang didefinisikan sebagai kesulitan dalam kategori perspektif menulis, mentransfer bahasa, dan proses menulis.

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is one of the required courses taught at all levels of education. English proficiency is required. English proficiency aids students in understanding the knowledge of others. It is founded mostly on role of English, which is used as a source of practically all knowledge. Furthermore, English is applied in almost every aspect of knowledge, both written and oral. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four skills taught in English. English proficiency is encouraged in addition to provide students with a better future. The teacher should have concepts about the aspects of language in the learning environment that causes students to learn the language.

Learning English is the process of being able to have a conversation in English. As a result, each student must be able to master English as a preparation for the future. In truth, the world is faced with an outbreak of the COVID-19 disease, which has spread to Indonesia. This condition has a significant impact on all community activities in a variety of fields. The field of education is one of the most challenged activities. Ignoring the fact that education has played a major role in human civilisation thus far. In the current climate, schools require additional educational teaching strategy to achieve the sustainability of the teaching learning process (Simanihuruk et al., 2021).

As a subset of all online education, online learning has always been dedicated to providing access to academic experiences that are, at the very least, more flexible in time and place than campus-based education. Online learning mainly contains email like applications, chat, group discussion, streaming audio or video. The majority of online learning features are connected

to time and place flexibility, student and lecturer interaction, and many aspects that online learning shares with online education (Simamora, 2020).

Online learning during the Covid-19 era requires educators to be creative in compiling interesting learning materials so that students can study the material well and not get bored while learning. But in reality some of the problems faced by some students, especially those in semester 4th of the English department at the Islamic University Of Riau who have been online since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, have difficulty when they are writing an essay (Simanihuruk et al., 2021). Everyone should have an education. In this case, learning English is important for everyone, especially for our generation, because English is an international language and it is used all over the world (Yulianti et al., 2019).

Writing is one of the most important skills in teaching English because it is a medium for exchanging ideas, thoughts, and information in writing (Hasibuan et al., 2020). Writing is one of the most important skills that first and second language learners must master (Abbas, M. F., & Herdi, H. (2018). This is an active skill that requires learners to be active in language production. However, the writing process is difficult because you need to master a variety of skills, such as processing content, organizing ideas, and applying grammar rules and rhetorical devices (Madkour, 2016).

Besides, some students have more difficulty learning online. Students are given only a section of the subject without explanations and then respond on the issues given by the teacher via learning media. Not just student, but also lecturers, face learning difficulties when it comes to explaining, enriching, and explaining material. (Ponmozhi & Thenmozhi, 2017). Based on researches on essay writing problems, all students have their own difficulties. English subject must be learned at university level as a required subject. On the other hand, it is quite challenging for Indonesian students to master English skill, especially in writing an essay (Nazilah et al., 2021).

However, just a few of researchers who investigating about the difficulties in writing essays faced by college students in Indonesia, especially in Pandemic situation. This study focused in investigating students' difficulties in writing essay which was framed as difficult task to do even in normal situation in the classroom by direct scaffolding from the lecturer. This research's contribution can serve as a foundation for developing or implementing an appropriate strategy in teaching Essay Writing Course for the English education department. Thus, the primary goal of this study is to analyze students' challenges in essay writing by asking the research question: What are the obstacles faced by higher education students in writing essays during Pandemic Covid-19?

METHOD

This study was investigation design by quantitative data via a distributed web-based questionnaire provided as numerical data on graphics and charts. 34 students from fourth semester students were involved as sample of this study to response the questionnaire given. This questionnaire was based on Ceylan's (2019) questionnaire which focuses on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. It was designed in the form of a five-point Likert Scale (1= strongly agree (SA), 2= agree (A), 3= neutral (N), 4= disagree (D), 5= strongly disagree (SD) and consisted of two sections: demographic data and students' beliefs about essay writing difficulties. As aforementioned, writing also becomes the most difficult skill, particularly in

English Education. Also, students at the tertiary level experienced various obstacles in their processes of writing. As aforementioned, writing also becomes the most difficult skill, particularly in English Language Education. As a result, students at the tertiary level experienced various obstacles in their processes of writing.

Furthermore, few steps were followed to collect data for this study; creating the questionnaire in Google Form, giving the questionnaire to students who have had difficulty learning essay writing, sharing the questionnaire with the students via WhatsApp application, and obtaining the questionnaire that has been shared only with students. The questionnaires filled out by students were then evaluated by the researchers (Simanihuruk et al., 2021). In addition, students' writing skills have also been identified as a significant factor affecting their essay writing process of the study.

The essay has been the most frequent kind of assignment in academic writing. An essay is a bit of writing that consists of one topic divided into numerous paragraphs (one for each main point), beginning with the opening paragraph and ending with the concluding paragraph. The primary elements of the essay are (1) the introduction paragraph, that also provides tempting statements to the readers' attention, (2) the body paragraphs, which provide development of a sub-topic of the subject in each paragraph, and (3) the conclusion paragraph, that further clarifies the main points and includes additional quotations.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The obstacles in writing essays could be presented by focusing the statement on three indicators such as knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. The questionnaire responses of participants would be displayed in the form of frequency, percentage, average, and standard deviation which can be seen from table 1 as following:

Table 1. Students' Obstacles in Writing Essays

No	Questions	Answer				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I have no problem with the interest in essay writing	2,9%	8,8%	52,9%	29,4%	5,9%
2.	I do not set goals when I start to write an essay	2,9%	35,3%	41,2%	20,6%	0%
3.	I faced challenge with self-confident while writing an essay	0%	5,9%	38,2%	50%	5,9%
4.	I have problem with organizing thoughts or generating ideas	0%	8,8%	41,2%	47,1%	2,9%
5.	I have problem with organizing	0%	5,9%	47,1%	47,1%	0%

	thoughts or generating ideas					
6.	I fell less motivated in writing an essay	0%	26,5%	32,4%	35,3%	5,9%
7.	I do not practice writing an essay in academic performance	2,9%	41,2%	44,1%	11,8%	0%
8.	I understand well the instruction from lecturer about writing instruction in essay writing	0%	2,9%	35,3%	58,8%	2,9%
9.	I get feedback from the lecturer about my essay clearly	0%	0%	17,6%	61,8%	20,6%
10.	I do not know about the writing processes such as pre-writing, drafting, editing, etc	0%	35,3%	55,9%	8,8%	0%
11.	I have problem in transferring my essay to target language while writing essay	0%	8,8%	44,1%	47,1%	0%
12.	I have difficulty in using correct grammar when writing an essay	0%	11,8%	44,1%	38,2%	5,9%
13.	Vocabulary knowledge has a portion of students' essay writing difficulties	0%	2,9%	52,9%	35,3%	8,8%
14.	I have trouble in structuring appropriate essay about the topic that will be discussing	0%	14,7%	52,9%	32,4%	0%

The researchers illustrate the participants' difficulties in Essay Writing from the data-gathering questionnaire by the following domains:

Item 1 explored the result of the analysis of item 1 until 13. The data percentage on item number 1 shows that the majority of students had no trouble with their interest in the Essay Writing Course (52.9% neutral). While 29.4% of participants (n=10) agreed with the claim that they are uninterested in the Essay Writing Course, 8.8 percent of participants (n=3) disagreed.

Item 2 indicates that majority of participants do not really set a goal when they start to write an essay (41.2% neutral). And meanwhile, 20.6% of the respondents indicated with the statement. Similarly, 35.3% of the respondents stated disagreement with the statement.

For item 3 show the percentages prove that the majority of participants had writing issues (50% agree, 5.9% strongly agree). While 38.2% of participants (n=13) were neutral with the

statement, it suggests they had difficulty being self-confident while writing an essay. In comparison, just a minor percentage of participants (5,9%) or (n=2) disagreed with the statement.

According to the researcher, the students had various writing issues when writing an essay. First, the students are unmotivated to write essay. When the lecture asked them to write, they remained quiet because they had no idea what they wanted to write. As a result, if there was a writing assignment, some participants liked to cheat and needed more time to complete it. Second, when writing an essay, the students did not follow a good strategy. For example, they did not write the draft or the issue relating to what they wanted to write. Third, the students lacked knowledge of essay components (anamaryanti et al., 2015).

The data percentage from question 4 suggests that most students feel anxious while writing an essay (47.1% agree), while 41.2% of participants (n=14) are indifferent with the statement and 8.8% of respondents (n=3) disagree with the statement.

One of the difficulties in writing an essay is a lack of ideas. When we run out of ideas, we turn to plagiarism by copying and pasting other people's essays without citing them. We all know that writing an essay requires not only the expression of thoughts, but also the organization of words. They indicate that we have a tendency to rely on quotations in our essays and use sources to demonstrate knowledge or arrange ideas. With citation, we will not be regarded as copying the ideas of other writers on their own.

The majority of online learning aspects are connected to distance and time flexibility, student and instructor interaction, and many aspects that online learning shares with distant education. As a result, online learning may not even be ready to serve all disciplines in the same way, and that not all online learning platforms are the same. (Ine Rahayu Purnamaningsih, 2021).

According to the statistics for item 5, the majority of participants (47.1% agree) claimed their writing difficulties came from organizing thoughts or developing ideas. The fact that 47.1% of participants (n=16) are neutral with the theories are statements that they have problems organizing their thoughts or producing ideas. In contrast, only a few subjects (5.9%, n=2) could not get the same experience.

As the most significant aspect of learning a language, writing can help students become stronger by introducing additional grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary. Authors can develop their thoughts in an organized manner by learning the skill of writing. Before writing, authors must consider how their thoughts will be received easily by the reader (Ismail et. Al., 2018). Writers must use appropriate written language so that the reader can understand the author's ideas (Pratiwi, 2016).

The data percentage from item 6 suggests that most students were less inspired to write an essay (35.3% agree, 5.9% strongly agree), although 32.4% of participants (n=11) were neutral with the statement, and 8.8% of participants (n=3) disagree with this statement. Furthermore, as mentioned in item 6, the participants generally accepted (44.1% neutral) and (11,8% agree (n=4)) claimed that they did not practice writing in academic performance. Moreover, 41,2% of disagree participants (n=14) disagreed with the statement.

In terms of productivity, writing is comparable to speaking. Writing, in contrast to speaking, is more difficult because it is less spontaneous and more constant. It is also evident that, unlike with conversation, we cannot interact with the audience and change during the

writing process. Writing becomes less flexible than speaking, and the vocabulary used in writing is becoming more standardized.

When motivation is regarded and evaluated as a mindset that can be formed and enhanced through interesting occupations, the assignment of essays will be vastly different. It is evident that writing assignments can be monotonous, predictable, and the benefits of the task are not always visible. As a result, in able to aid students in becoming effective writers, it is necessary to involve both students and lecture in the development of the assignments (Valiantien et al., 2016).

Item 8 and 9 show the participants' reactions to the lecturer's directions and suggestions on the students' essay writing. The significant majority of students (58.8% (n=20) for writing instruction and 61.8% (n=21) for lecturers' responses) agreed with the claims. However, just a small percentage of the participants disagreed with the statement.

Item 10 analyzes participants' perceptions of writing processes as a problem when writing. Almost all students (55,9% neutral and 8,8 % agree) are unfamiliar of writing procedures such as pre-writing, drafting, editing, and so on. Furthermore, only 35.3% (n=12) of participants disagree with their lack of knowledge about the writing processes. Briefly, the cognitive issues encountered by students while writing essays are primarily related to transferring to the target language and a lack of writing processes (47,1% agree and 44.1% neutral). Furthermore, just 8.8% (n=8) of participants disagree with the statement "I have or have not had difficulty converting my essay to the target language when writing."

As item 12 indicates, linguistic competencies such as grammar became the most challenging issue that the majority of participants (38,2% agree, 5.9 % strongly agree, and 44,1% neutral) faced. Otherwise, just a small percentage of answers (11,8%, n=4) indicate disagreement in linguistic categories. Furthermore, item 13 reveals that students' essay writing challenges are compounded by a lack of vocabulary knowledge (35,3% agree, 8,8% strongly agree and 52,9% neutral). Only 2,9% of participants (n=1) disagree in the vocabulary task.

For item 14, the majority of the students gave positive responses, indicating that organizing essays was their writing challenge. Participants' mindset in structuring acceptable essays has become one of their challenges, according to 32,4% of responses (n=11) and 52,9% (n=18). Similarly, 17,7% of participants (n=5) respond negatively to the statement. To summarize, practically most participants encountered grammar issues while writing an essay.

The findings of this research were shown that difficulties in writing can be affected from students' motivation, self-confidence, anxiousness, and enthusiasm. According to Yoon (2012), anxiety is a psychological symptom that occurs when people are nervous in new situations. This cannot be quantified because it is deeply associated with human feelings and emotions such as nervousness, tension, frustration, and uneasiness. A normal human emotion that can be triggered by any internal or external change, uncertain situation, or feeling of uncertainty (Of & Language, 2021).

There are some categories should be supported as well such as grammar, the structure of sentences, and sentence coherence whether it is connected to one another or not (Riski & Ahmad, 2021). Another participant stated that grammar is a key issue for students while writing in English. Furthermore, topic 12 explained students' difficulties with language mastery with a 38.2 percent agreement rate. To dig deeper into students' perceptions, the interview results showed that the majority of respondents claimed that their writing obstacle was a lack of vocabulary knowledge, particularly in academic words.

CONCLUSION

Students' impressions of online learning are not particularly positive; only half of students think that online learning is relevant to the current situation and are unsure that students regarding online learning can enhance the teaching process (Nasution & Ahmad, 2020). Many issues contribute to this, including student internet quota burden, internet access problems, difficulty interacting with lecturers, difficulty doing and collecting tasks, and student lack of preparation to participate in online learning.

Students' and lecturers' mindsets during teaching and learning Essay Writing Course cause affective issues. According to the research, the majority of students indicated that they were not organically encouraged to participate in writing class due to their lack of enthusiasm and confidence in writing. As a result, they lacked the opportunity to practice academic writing skills and produce a solid essay product. As a result, students must practice writing as often as possible in order to produce a well-written essay. Cognitive difficulties are now defined as difficulties in the categories of writing perspective, transferring language, and writing process.

According to the findings, students agreed that transition to the target language and the writing process influenced their writing issues when producing essays. Meanwhile, developing ideas before writing and rewriting the essay have also been identified as student obstacles. Those who were affected by the instructional strategies used by their lecturer while teaching the course. According to the findings, using good writing styles may assist students in producing essays more effectively.

The available data shows that most of the students stated that they did not care and were interested in being involved in the writing class because of their lack of interest and confidence in writing. The findings show that students agree that the writing process has a major influence on students' writing difficulties in compiling essays. Furthermore, the important aspect of writing is the linguistic area which has great responses in students' difficulties in essay writing. It is undeniable that knowledge of grammar is an obstacle for students in writing essays. Likewise, students emphasized that the difficulty when writing essays was compiling essays from paragraphs and paragraphs from sentences because of a lack of understanding of the structure and procedures for writing good and correct essays.

To make further discussion, further research is needed from a different perspective or context. Therefore, suggestions and critical critiques that support the researcher really need to advance a better understanding of the problem of writing. Some of the findings in this study are expected to be a better statement for further research or creating new methods in teaching essay writing in the context of a foreign language English, especially during a pandemic that makes it difficult for lecturers and students in the learning process.

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