

Kemahiran Penulisan Akademik Di Universiti: Analisis Keperluan Dan Kompetensi Semasa Pelajar ESL

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ABSTRAK

Pengenalan- Penguasaan kemahiran penulisan akademik sangat penting untuk memastikan tahap kompetensi pelajar dan menghasilkan graduan berkualiti tinggi di peringkat universiti. Walaupun terdapat keperluan untuk menguasai kemahiran penulisan akademik, sebahagian besar pelajar ESL khususnya di institusi tinggi masih menghadapi kesukaran untuk memenuhi syarat graduasi universiti. Pelajar ESL dalam konteks universiti umumnya tidak didedahkan dengan mekanisme penulisan akademik. Kesannya, pelajar-pelajar ini tidak dapat menulis dengan menggunakan struktur laras bahasa dalam konteks yang sesuai.

Objektif – Kajian semasa bertujuan untuk menganalisis keperluan dan kompetensi semasa pelajar ESL dalam penulisan akademik.

Methodologi – Seramai 65 pelajar ESL di sebuah universiti awam di Malaysia telah memberi respons dalam satu soal selidik yang diadaptasi dari Choo (1998) untuk mengetahui pengetahuan berkaitan kandungan mereka dalam penulisan akademik. Dapatan kajian dianalisis secara kuantitatif dengan menggunakan analisis deskriptif.

Dapatan – Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti pelajar (76.9%) menghadapi kesukaran untuk menulis secara akademik dan hampir separuh daripada responden (46.2%) percaya bahawa bahagian tinjauan literatur adalah bahagian yang paling sukar dalam penulisan akademik.

Kepentingan – Hasil kajian ini menyumbang kepada maklumbalas yang berguna kepada penyelidik masa depan untuk merancang dan mengembangkan bahan pembelajaran yang sesuai untuk pelajar ESL untuk meningkatkan kemahiran menulis akademik para pelajar.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL), penulisan akademik, pelajar universiti, penulisan penyelidikan

Academic Writing Skills in University: Analysis of ESL Students' Current Needs and Competency

ABSTRACT

Introduction- Acquisition of skills related to academic writing is highly crucial to ensure students' competency in producing high quality graduates at university levels. Despite of major needs and demands to acquire skills in academic writing, majority of ESL learners particularly in higher institution are still struggling to meet the university's requirement for graduation. ESL students in the context of university levels are generally unfamiliar with the mechanisms in academic writing. As a result, these students are unable to write using appropriate structures and contexts.

Purpose – The current study aims to analyse ESL students' current needs and competency in academic writing.

Methodology – A total of 65 ESL learners in a public university in Malaysia responded to a questionnaire adapted from Choo (1998) to discover their content-related knowledge in academic writing. Data collected from the study were analysed quantitatively using descriptive analysis.

Findings – The findings yielded that majority of the students (76.9%) were currently having difficulty to write academically and almost half of the respondents (46.2%) believed that literature review section is the most difficult section in an academic paper.

Significance – Findings from this study provide useful insights for future researchers to design and develop appropriate learning materials for ESL learners to enhance their academic writing skills.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), academic writing, university students, research writing

Introduction

Second language (L2) skills are becoming the important aspects to be acquired university students especially for future communication and career opportunities. In Malaysia, English language is officially regarded as the second language (L2) due to the acceptance of the language among Malaysians. Therefore, acquisition of English as second language is inevitable especially for students at tertiary levels of education. Ability to master a second language serves an added value for all graduates from universities. In tertiary institutions, fulfillment of graduation requirement is one of the major concerns among students (Kennedy, 2015). In this context, inability to write theses and dissertation

effectively hinder their motivation fulfill the graduation requirement. In the context of language learning, majority of ESL students are constantly having difficulties on acquiring academic writing skills (Ismail & Mohammad, 2017). It is precedent that academic writing skills are becoming one of the most important language skills to be acquired by students due to its importance envisaged by respective university. In addition, the current resources for academic writing skills in Malaysian universities are still scarce.

The emergence of English as a medium of communication and instruction at tertiary levels resulted an increasing demand for second language enhancement. In the context of English as a second language, the four basic skills to be acquired by second language learners are listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Kayimbaşioğlu, Oktekin, & Hacı, 2016). Comparing the four skills mentioned earlier, writing skills are regarded as the most difficult skills to be acquired by language learners. Language learners' mastery of writing skills could reflect their proficiency of the language. Writing skills are the most complex skills to be acquired due to reiterating cycles of reasoning, structuring ideas and constructing sentences. Generally, writing skills involves the mastery of constructing thesis statements, presenting topic sentences and generating supporting details (Ansarimoghaddam, Tan, & Yong, 2017; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). Due to these complexities, writing skills are perceived as the most daunting skills to be acquired and eventually hinder students' motivation to enhance their skills.

Background of the Study

Production of academic writing in university provides platform for novice researchers to discuss their empirical analysis of a study. In general, final year students in Malaysian universities are required to produce an academic piece of writing in various forms such as final year project, academic exercises, theses and dissertation (Azmuiddin, Nor, & Hamat, 2017; Othman & Nordin, 2013). Therefore, academic writing in universities is considered as one of the most important skills to be acquired by university students in the context of writing skills. The current study discovered a research gap in the previous studies on the insufficiency of learning resources for academic writing enhancement among university students. In response to the aforementioned problem, the researchers in the current study aim to discover ESL students' needs and current competency in academic writing at tertiary levels. The objectives of this study are as followed:

1. to discover ESL students current competency in terms of content-related knowledge in academic writing; and
2. to analyse ESL students' needs in an academic writing integrated with a game-based learning approach.

Methodology

The current study employed a survey research design using an adapted questionnaire by Choo (1990). After the adaptation of the questionnaire, validation by ESL experts was conducted. A pilot study was also conducted to analyse the reliability of the questionnaire that has involved a total of 30 students. In the actual study, a total of 65 ESL students participated through online distribution. The respondents are the undergraduate students of TESL programme in a public university in Malaysia. The ESL students are in their final year of study and have undergone the first part of research writing course in their

penultimate year. Insights from the students are useful as it provides meaningful feedback from the students who have previously enrolled for a Research Methodology class. Collection of data was carried out using the adapted questionnaire mentioned earlier and the data were analysed quantitatively. Analysed data were presented using descriptive statistics using percentage values.

Result

Analyses of the study were presented according to the construct in the questionnaires. The first construct sought for ESL students’ familiarity and general overview of academic writing. Items in the constructs consisted of their familiarity of an academic paper, overall difficulty of an academic paper and most complexity of academic writing perceived by ESL students.

Table 1: ESL Students’ Familiarity with Academic Paper

Statement	Answer	
	Yes	No
1. Have you ever written a research paper?	48 (73.8%)	17 (26.2%)

In table 1, it is evident that majority of the students are familiar with a research paper. A total of 48 participants responded that they have written an academic piece of writing such as a research paper. Only a small number of participants were not familiar with a research paper and responded that they have not written any research paper with a total percentage of 26.2% the overview of students’ general familiarity with an academic writing could be regarded as highly familiar whereby 73.8% of the respondents stated that they have written a research paper.

Table 2: ESL Students’ General Difficulty in Regards to Academic Paper

Statement	Answer		
	Yes	No	I haven't written any before
1. Do you have any difficulties when you were writing an academic paper?	50 (76.9%)	6 (9.2%)	9 (13.8%)

Analysis of students’ perceived difficulty of a research paper writing revealed that majority of ESL students agreed that they were having difficulties when writing an academic paper. From the analysis, 50 of the respondents (76.9%) agreed to the abovementioned statement. In relation to the statement, it is also notable that only a small number of respondents (9.2%) mentioned that they were not having any difficulties when writing an academic paper. The rest of the respondents (13.8%) stated that they have not written any before.

From the findings, it could be asserted that majority of ESL students were having difficulties when writing an academic paper.

Table 3: Difficulties to Conduct a Research

Statement	Answer				
	Topic selection	Literature review	Research method design	Analysis of results	Conclusion
1. Which section do you think is the most difficult section when carrying out a research?	11 (16.9%)	30 (46.2%)	11 (16.9%)	13 (20%)	-

In table 3, the researchers sought for ESL students' general overview of difficulties that the ESL students faced in carrying out a research. From the findings, majority of the respondents agreed that "literature review search" is regarded as the most difficult part in conducting a research. A total of 30 respondents (46.2%) asserted that in carrying out a research, literature review is regarded as the most critical part for the. Overall, it is evident that the ESL students were having difficulties in almost all aspects including topic selection, literature review, research method design and analysis of the result. Therefore, it could be concluded that almost all aspects of research paper is regarded as "difficult" as the ESL students. It is also worth to note that the respondents also agreed that other aspects of a research paper writing is generally difficult (Geri, Winer, & Zaks, 2017). A total of 11 respondents (16.9%) agreed that topic selection and research methodology design is difficult and 13 respondents (20%) agreed that analysis of results is difficult.

Table 5: ESL Students' Difficulty in Research Paper Writing

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	Do you know how to write a literature review?	9 (13.8%)	48 (73.9%)	8 (12.3%)	-	-
2	Do you know how to design a research project?	5 (7.7%)	41 (63.1%)	17 (26.2%)	2 (3.1%)	-
3	Do you know how to analyse data from a research project?	6 (9.2%)	49 (75.4%)	9 (13.8%)	-	-

1 - Yes, I know it very well ; 2 - Yes, I know a little about it ; 3 - No, I don't really know ; 4 - No, I know nothing about it ; 5 - It doesn't matter to me

Analysis of students' difficulty in writing a research paper in detailed is presented in Table 5. From the data presented able, the researchers of the current study sought for their feedback on three main aspects of an academic writing which is reflected in the form of research paper sections. It aims to discover students' feedback of their current level of content-related knowledge including their competency in writing literature review,

conducting a research and analyzing data from a research project. The participants' responses for these items were reflected in a 5-point Likert scale presented above. Scale is number as 1 - Yes, I know it very well ; 2 - Yes, I know a little about it ; 3 - No, I don't really know ; 4 - No, I know nothing about it ; 5 - It doesn't matter to me.

In the first time, majority of the respondents asserted their unfamiliarity and low competency in managing and discussing literature reviews. In general, a total of 56 respondents evidently showed their low competency in literature review section. It is noted that 48 respondents (73.9%) agreed that they only know a little about literature review, and a total number of 8 respondents (12.3%) agreed that they have no idea in writing a literature review. From the analysis, only a small number of respondents (13.8%) have a high competency in writing a literature review. From the analysis, it is evident that majority of ESL students are having difficulties to write literature review effectively in a research paper or academic piece of writing. Difficulties in writing literature review may be due to the students' lack of competency and familiarity of the formats (Fadda, 2012; Yang, 2011)

Apart from students' difficulties in writing literature review, the researchers also discovered interesting findings on students' competency in designing a research project. From the data analysed, it is noted that a total of 60 participants (92.4%) have low competency in designing a research project. From the analysis, it is also interesting to assert that apart from difficulties in writing a literature review, ESL students are also constantly struggling in designing a research project. Designing a research project includes substantial information and meticulous reviews of past studies before selecting an appropriate design in a research. It could be concluded that students' competency in writing literature reviews is parallel to their competency in designing a research project. Ineffective and limited review of literature resulted incompetency in designing a research project.

Findings from the study also revealed that ESL students were having difficulties in analyzing data from a research project. From the respondents' feedbacks, only a small number of respondents (9.2%) stated that they are competent enough to analyse data from a research project. Majority of the ESL students in this study stated that they are having difficulties in analyzing data from a research project. A total number of 49 respondents (75.4%) stated that they only have a limited or little knowledge about how to analyse data from a research project, and 9 respondents (13.8%) stated that they are unsure of data analysis in a research project.

Conclusion

The main objective is to analyse students; current needs in an academic writing course to further enhance their academic writing skills. The current study investigates the students' current competency of academic writing and discovers their future needs in academic writing to fulfil their demands of writing for graduation and publication. Data from this study revealed that "Literature Review" is regarded as the most difficult aspects to be mastered by the students. This current response received may be due to the need for extensive reading to produce a high quality literature reviews. Data for this study is useful for future researcher and content developer for academic writing course to scrutinise the current materials and content of academic writing course. It is important for the content developer to analyse the students' need to make sure that the students are able to learn effectively in an ESL classroom. The current study also shed a new light for the researchers

to provide useful materials for the students to further enhance their academic writing in the future.

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