

Academic Writing Intervention

An Alternative for Non-Thesis Track Students' Final Paper Supervision

Nita Novianti

*English Department, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Jl. Dr. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung Indonesia
nitinoviantiwahyu@upi.edu*

Keywords: Academic Writing Intervention, Non-thesis Track Students, Final Paper Supervision.

Abstract: Non-thesis track students in Indonesian universities are required to submit a final research-based or scientific paper as part of the requirements for their graduation. However, they do not receive supervision as is given to the thesis-track students. Therefore, this study aims to implement Academic Writing Intervention program to help students produce quality scientific papers publishable in anthologies or journals and improve their academic writing skills. Participants in this study consisted of two lecturers teaching non-thesis courses and 15 students of an English literature program of a state university in Indonesia for the even semester of the 2016/2017 academic year. The comparison between the papers written before and after the Academic Writing Intervention program shows great improvement in the quality of the paper produced after the intervention program. Overall, the students gave positive responses to the intervention program. However, great reliance on the lecturers reduces the students' autonomy in the writing process. Some recommendations for the department and higher education in general regarding the implementation of this program to assist students in writing publishable scientific papers are given.

1 INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Circular of Directorate General of Higher Education No. 152/E/T/2012 dated January 27, 2012 undergraduate students of either the thesis or non-thesis track are obliged to write scientific papers and publish them in scientific journals, such as unaccredited national or international anthologies or journals. However, non-thesis track students, unlike their thesis-track counterparts, do not receive any supervision for the scientific paper writing. This lack of supervision causes the produced scientific papers to be of low quality, especially compared to those produced by the thesis track students. This should be a concern, considering the increasing number of students who take the non-thesis track, especially in the English literature program of a state university in Bandung, Indonesia, under the study, and in any majors in Indonesian universities in general.

While providing individual supervision seems to be impossible, considering the large number of students to supervise, academic writing intervention program can be an alternative. The Academic Writing Intervention program can be embedded in the non-thesis courses, so students can use their

previous content knowledge and one reinforced in the non-thesis courses to get ideas for writing scientific papers. This is in accordance with the argument of McWilliams and Allan (2014) that "Embedding academic-writing interventions in subject disciplines is a practical way of helping students make explicit connections between discourse variables of their subject and the particular demands of a given assignment" (p. 1).

Thus, this research sought to investigate whether the implementation of Academic Writing Intervention can help improve the quality of scientific papers produced by non-thesis track students as well as their academic writing skills.

Out of the many types of academic papers, one of the most difficult is scientific or research paper for publication in scientific journals. Day (1983), as quoted in Derntl (2014) defines research or scientific paper as "a written and published report describing the results of original research." Similar to academic writings in general, scientific papers also have different conventions depending on the editor's policy of a journal (Derntl, 2014). The differences range from structure, format, content, to citation styles. In terms of structure, some journals require that papers be written with IMRAD structure or

introduction, method, results, and discussion (Peh and Ng, 2008).

Unfortunately, there is not much research on academic writing, especially scientific papers written undergraduate students. Most research has focused on scientific papers written by graduate students (Al Badi, 2015; Seyabi and Tuzlukova, 2014; Al Fadda, 2012). The lack of similar research at the undergraduate level is likely due to the novelty of the trend of writing scientific papers among undergraduate students, especially in Indonesia.

On the other hand, there have been many studies of writing interventions conducted by previous researchers, and many have demonstrated the success of these writing intervention programs. Archer (2008) investigated the influence of the Writing Center Interventions on students' academic writing and found that the intervention provided by the writing center improved students' writing quality. Meanwhile, Nasir et al. (2013) provide interventions in an action research project to improve the creative writing skills of primary school students, and these interventions prove to be beneficial to students.

Writing Intervention on a large scale has also been applied in some countries; for example, in the United States there was the "Tiered Writing Intervention Models" program to help improve writing skills of high school students coming from low-achieving schools (Shaver et al., 2015) and "Self-Regulated Strategy Development" as a Tier 2 intervention for low-grade primary graders with low achievement (Flanders, 2014). In the Netherlands, writing intervention has also been proven to help improve the ability of primary school children in writing (Koster et al, 2015). Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004) also proved the success of writing-to-learn interventions in improving student academic achievement. The same results are also shown by research of Rogers and Graham (2008). At the university level, Switzer and Perdue (2011) reported the results of a study of the implementation of an intervention model called "Dissertation 101" to improve information seeking, evaluation, and synthesis skills of postgraduate students majoring in education by collaborating between academic librarians, lecturers writing center, and the graduate students themselves. Perin and Hare (2010) reported a Reading-Writing Intervention program for students preparing to attend university courses at a community college. A program called Content Comprehension Strategy Intervention (CSSI) has been proved to be effective as an intervention program to improve the academic community's academic reading and writing skills.

Given the success of various academic writing intervention programs at various levels of schools and countries, the researcher is optimistic that similar programs will succeed in improving academic writing skills and the quality of scientific papers produced by the non-thesis track students participating in this study.

2 METHODS

This qualitative research was conducted in the study program of English Literature in a state university in Bandung, Indonesia. It involved two lecturers of a non-thesis course and 15 students attending the course.

Data were in the form of assessment results of scientific papers before and after the Academic Writing Intervention. Before applying the Academic Writing Intervention, modelling and brainstorming were carried out to help students write a scientific paper. After the papers were collected, Academic Writing Intervention Program was applied for eight meetings. The papers produced before and after the intervention program were compared to see whether there was improvement in their writing. To support the primary data, interviews with lecturers and selected students were carried out. Questionnaires were also distributed to students to find out whether students felt the benefit of the intervention in their academic writing skills. In addition, to ensure reliability and validity, the instruments of rubric assessment and questionnaire were validated by two experts in the field of scientific paper assessment.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the Academic Writing Intervention program is in the form of a workshop that incorporates various elements of intervention: Brainstorming, drafting, peer feedback, and editing (Zúñiga and Macias, 2006), assisted by feedback and assessment from lecturers of course subjects. The Academic Writing Intervention emphasizes collaborative writing that has been proven to help improve academic writing skills, especially for EFL students (Kwon, 2014), and continuous supervision from lecturers, both in groups and individually. The integration of several writing techniques in the program is based on the argument that it is important to integrate several elements of the intervention to find out which works best for students, as quoted from the recommendations given by research report

of Graham and Perin (2007): "The optimal mix. . . [is] educators need to test mixes of intervention elements to find the ones that work for students with different needs" (p. 12).

In the first seven meetings, students were given examples of articles published in reputable national and international journals, and the course content was tailored to the interests of students. Students were also guided in their brainstorming to find the topic to write about.

Once the modelling process was completed, students were assigned to write their first paper without any intervention from the lecturers. The lecturers only provided overall feedback on the topics and ways of writing. The result was predictably not satisfactory. Most of the papers did not meet the convention of scientific papers, although in the modelling the conventions were described in great detail. The results are further described in Table 1.

Table 1: Assessment of Students' First Drafts.

No.	Assessment Item	Assessment Results	
		Number of Articles Meeting the Requirements	Number of Articles Not Meeting the Requirements
1	Abstract	7	8
2	Introduction	3	12
3	Literature Review	5	10
4	Method	10	5
5	Findings and Discussion	1	14
6	References	4	11

Table 1 shows that almost all scientific papers written by students with modelling and lecturing only were not publishable. The most common error is in the writing of Findings and Discussion, where almost all students could not describe the findings in accordance with the purpose of research. In addition, students did not discuss the findings in comparison to the theories and previous research results. Meanwhile, almost all students were able to write the method quite well.

Academic Writing Intervention was then applied. In the process, intensive supervision was given by lecturers for all parts of writing, ranging from content, style, to technical and mechanic aspects of the writing. The intervention was mostly done in three ways: the first was a workshop in the classroom. In this activity, the lecturers provide enrichment in the class. The lecturers explain how to write a paper for a particular section and give an

example. The lecturing is completed with discussions with students. This activity is followed by peer review and editing, where students read their scientific papers and provide feedback to each other. The third activity is teacher conferencing, which is an activity where students have an individual face-to-face supervision with one of the lecturers.

After going through the academic writing intervention program, improvement of the quality of student papers was obtained.

Table 2: Assessment of Students' Final Drafts.

No.	Assessment Item	Assessment Results	
		Number of Articles Meeting the Requirements	Number of Articles Not Meeting the Requirements
1	Abstract	14	1
2	Introduction	15	0
3	Literature Review	15	0
4	Method	15	0
5	Findings and Discussion	12	3
6	References	13	2

Table 2 indicates that almost all students who participated in Academic Writing Intervention activities are able to produce papers that meet the criteria specified in the rubric. There are still some students who make errors in their papers, with the most common errors found in the section of findings and discussion. Generally, the error lies in: 1) The absence of general findings that answer the research question(s) or the purpose of the study; 2) Some missing important findings; and 3) Findings not discussed in accordance with the theories presented in the literature review section and/or in comparison to the findings of previous research. Meanwhile, generally errors in citation style are in the forms of inconsistencies or missing volume, issue, city of publication, etc.

When interviewed, the students who still wrote parts of this article incorrectly admitted that they did not make revisions as suggested by the lecturers, and submitted the papers at the last moment. Nevertheless, the quality of papers written by students in general has met the requirements of scientific papers publishable in scientific journals. Hence, it can be said that the Academic Writing Intervention program has helped improved the quality of academic papers produced by the non-thesis track students. This success corresponds to previous successful intervention programs using workshop method in EFL (English as a Foreign

Language) or ELT (English Language Teaching) settings (Echeverri et al., 2011).

Results of questionnaire further reveal that students had positive responses to the academic writing intervention program. This positive response is similar to that obtained by previous writing intervention programs (Archer, 2008; Nasir et al., 2013). Of the three types of intervention activities undertaken, based on a questionnaire filled by students, almost all say that teacher conferencing is the most useful activity. According to the students, in the conferencing, they get valuable feedback and they can ask questions related to the writing process. Meanwhile, peer review and peer editing activities, according to most students are the least helpful. This is because they consider their average ability to be the same as their peers', so no significant input is obtained from the process to improve their paper.

Although the papers produced improved in their quality, and students gave positive responses to the intervention program, it cannot be claimed that students have improvement in their academic writing skills in general or whether the improved skills will last long. This is in line with Keranen and Munive's (2012) argument that although most writing intervention programs have helped to improve the academic writing skills of participants, the impact is not long. Often, shortly after the program is over, participants lose the ability they have gained through the experience of the workshop. Therefore, it is also important to help increase the motivation and love of students in writing, so that the skills they acquire in this intervention program will last long, even after they graduate and work.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This research has attempted to implement the program of Academic Writing Intervention in the non-thesis courses for English literature students in a state university in Bandung. In general, this program is very helpful for students in writing papers publishable in journals as one of the prerequisites for their graduation. The program also assists the study program that cannot facilitate the supervision of writing papers or final assignments for non-thesis track students.

Although overall the program can be declared successful, there are some things that need to be noted, among others, is that this program requires the seriousness of lecturers in guiding students to write a publishable paper, and this program also requires students to be able to independently develop

their papers in accordance with suggestion from the lecturers. This research has also shown that peer review and peer editing are not so popular among students. Meanwhile, when applied properly, students can benefit greatly from both of these processes. Therefore, the lecturers are expected to arrange two of these activities better so that the students are more motivated to do peer review and peer editing and so that students will not just rely on the supervision of the lecturer.

Finally, this academic writing intervention program is a pilot qualitative study that only involved a small number of participants. Meanwhile, most writing intervention programs were conducted in a large scale. Hence, future research is expected to expand this study in terms of scale and to also use mixed research methods to further validate the results.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article reports part of the results of research funded by the Institute of Research and Community Service of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia to which the writer expresses her utmost gratitude.

REFERENCES

- Al Badi, I. A. H., 2015. Academic writing difficulties of ESL learners. *The 2015 WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings*. pp. 65-78.
- Al Fadda, H., 2012. Difficulties in academic writing: From the perspective of King Saud University postgraduate students. *English Language Teaching*. 5(3), pp.123-130.
- Archer, A., 2008. Investigating the effect of Writing Centre interventions on student writing. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 22, pp.248-264.
- Bangert-Drowns, R. L., Hurlley, M. M., Wilkinson, B., 2004. The effects of school-based writing-to-learn interventions on academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*. 74, pp.29-58.
- Derntl, M., 2014. Basics of research paper writing and publishing. *International Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*. 6(2), pp.105-123.
- Echeverri, K. B., Marín, L. E., Castillo, V. M., 2011. *Improving academic writing in an ELT program through writers' workshops (Unpublished research report)*, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. Colombia.

- Flanders, C. A., 2014. *Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) for writing: A tier 2 intervention for fifth grade (Unpublished dissertation)*, The University of Southern Maine. USA.
- Graham, S., Perin, D., 2007. *Writing Next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools—A report to Carnegie Corporation New York*, Alliance for Excellent Education. Washington, DC.
- Keranen, N., Munive, S. M., 2012. Short and long-term effects of writing intervention from a psychological perspective on professional and academic writing in higher education—the EFL writers' workshop. *Journal of Academic Writing*. 2(1), pp. 48-58.
- Koster, M. P., Tribushinina, E., De Jong, P., Van-den Bergh, H. H., 2015. Teaching children to write: A meta-analysis of writing intervention research. *Journal of writing research*. 7(2), pp.299-324.
- Kwon, C., 2014. Student perspectives on group work and use of L1: Academic writing in a university EFL course in Thailand. *Second Language Studies*. 33(1), pp. 85-124.
- McWilliams, R., Allan, Q., 2014. Embedding academic literacy skills: Towards a best practice model. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*. 11(3), pp. 1-22.
- Nasir, L., Navqi, S. M., Bhamani, S., 2013. Enhancing students' creative writing skills: An action research project. *Acta Didactica Napocensia*. 6(2), pp. 27-32.
- Peh, W. C., Ng, K. H., 2008. Basic structure and types of scientific papers. *Singapore Med Journal*. 49(7), pp. 522-525.
- Perin, D., Hare, R., 2010. A contextualized reading-writing intervention for community college students. *Community College Research Center Brief*. 44, pp.1-4.
- Rogers, L., Graham, S., 2008. A meta-analysis of single subject design writing intervention research. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 100, pp. 879-906.
- Seyabi, F. A., Tuzlukova, V., 2014. Writing problems and strategies: An investigative study in the Omani School and university Context. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*. 3(4), pp. 37-48.
- Shaver, D., Wagner, M., Greene, S., 2015. *Tiered writing intervention models for secondary students: Project findings in brief*, SRI International. Menlo Park, California.
- Switzer, A., Perdue, S. W., 2011. Dissertation 101: A research and writing intervention for education graduate students. *Education Libraries*. 34(1), pp. 4-14.
- Zúñiga, G., Macias, D. F., 2006. Refining students' academic writing skills in an undergraduate foreign language teaching program. *Ikala, revista de lenguaje y cultura*. 11(17), pp. 311-336.