

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Writing in Language Learning

Writing ability is one of the essential skills that students must master, particularly at the higher education level. In the context of English language learning, academic writing is not only focused on the construction of sentences or paragraphs but also requires mastery of complex linguistic aspects, such as grammar, academic vocabulary, cohesion and coherence, as well as logical and critical thinking skills in developing arguments. According to Hyland (2019), writing is not merely a linguistic activity but also a cognitive and social process. This indicates that writing skills encompass more than just language proficiency; they also reflect ways of thinking and interacting within academic settings.

Furthermore, Hyland (2019) highlights several key indicators that contribute to the quality of academic writing. These indicators consist of eight essential components: vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, spelling, cohesion, coherence, organization, and digital writing habits. Vocabulary refers to the appropriate and varied use of academic words to convey precise meaning. Grammar involves the correct use of sentence structures and syntactic patterns. Mechanics and spelling relate to the accuracy of punctuation, capitalization, and word formation. Cohesion and coherence ensure that ideas are logically connected and flow smoothly throughout the text. Organization concerns the systematic arrangement of ideas, including the structure of introduction, body, and conclusion. Lastly, digital writing habits reflect students' ability to utilize digital tools responsibly and effectively in the writing process.

Therefore, these eight indicators play a significant role in shaping the overall quality of students' academic writing.

2.2.1. Content

The content aspect pertains to the quality, relevance, and depth of ideas expressed in a written work. It reflects how well a writer understands the topic, organizes their thoughts, and conveys meaningful information to the reader. Brown (2004) states that content

represents the writer's comprehension of the subject matter and their ability to generate, develop, and elaborate on ideas that are relevant and informative. Writing that demonstrates strong content provides insight, originality, and depth, going beyond surface-level descriptions to show critical engagement with the topic.

Similarly, Jacobs et al. (1981) emphasize that the content component assesses the completeness, richness, and significance of the ideas presented, as well as how effectively the writer communicates meaning to the reader. A well developed text not only includes sufficient details and supporting information but also maintains a clear focus on the main topic. Each paragraph should contribute meaningfully to the overall message, ensuring that ideas are logically connected and fully explored.

Raimes (1983) adds that good content is characterized by the writer's ability to think critically and analytically to interpret a topic, form judgments, and express ideas coherently. This means that effective writing is not merely about presenting facts but also about demonstrating reasoning, evaluation, and synthesis. A strong piece of writing shows the writer's engagement with the topic through logical arguments, relevant evidence, and examples that strengthen the credibility of the discussion.

In academic writing, the content aspect serves as the core foundation that determines the value and purpose of the entire composition. A text with well-developed content reflects intellectual maturity, depth of understanding, and the ability to construct meaning in a scholarly manner. Conversely, writing that lacks substantial content no matter how grammatically correct or well organized tends to be superficial, unconvincing, and ineffective in delivering its intended message.

In summary, content plays a crucial role as the essence of writing, shaping its overall quality and communicative impact. It ensures that a written work goes beyond form and structure by presenting ideas that are insightful, coherent, and academically meaningful. Without clear, relevant, and well developed ideas, a piece of writing loses its purpose and fails to engage or inform the reader effectively.

2.1.2. Organization (Including Cohesion and Coherence)

The *organization* aspect deals with how ideas are arranged and structured logically and systematically. Heaton (1990) explains that well organized writing reflects a coherent flow of thought, from the introduction to the body and finally to the conclusion. Jacobs et al. (1981) describe organization as encompassing two crucial components: cohesion and coherence.

Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical links between sentences and paragraphs, achieved through the use of cohesive devices such as conjunctions, reference words, and transitional markers (e.g., *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*). On the other hand, *coherence* relates to the logical connection and consistency of ideas throughout the text, allowing readers to follow the writer's train of thought easily.

Harmer (2004) adds that a well organized text presents ideas that flow naturally and are logically connected, where each paragraph contributes meaningfully to the overall argument or discussion. Effective organization ensures that the text has a clear introduction, a well-developed body, and a concise conclusion, all of which enhance the unity and readability of the composition.

Thus, organization can be defined as the writer's ability to arrange and connect ideas in a logical and cohesive manner, enabling readers to comprehend the message smoothly and effectively.

2.1.3. Language Use (Grammar)

The language use aspect assesses the degree of accuracy, variety, and complexity of grammatical structures applied in writing. Brown (2004) asserts that grammatical accuracy is a crucial element of effective writing since it ensures that meaning is conveyed clearly and precisely. Grammatical errors may blur meaning, disrupt the logical flow of ideas, or even cause misinterpretation by the reader. Meanwhile, Jacobs et al. (1981) explain that language use involves the correct and consistent application of grammatical components such as tense

usage, word order, clauses, and subject–verb agreement, all of which contribute to the coherence and comprehensibility of a text.

Furthermore, Harmer (2007) emphasizes that grammatical competence not only reflects the writer’s linguistic ability but also shows their concern for clarity, accuracy, and communicative appropriateness. A writer with good grammatical mastery can employ various sentence patterns effectively to achieve specific rhetorical purposes, add stylistic variety, and sustain the reader’s engagement. A well written text also demonstrates a balance between grammatical accuracy and stylistic diversity through the use of various sentence types simple, compound, complex, and compound complex to express ideas fluently and expressively.

In academic writing, mastery of language use also signifies the writer’s ability to construct logical arguments, connect ideas coherently, and present information in a formal and professional manner.

Therefore, *language use* is the foundation of written communication. Writers who master grammar are able to express ideas more clearly, avoid ambiguity, and produce texts that are both accurate and communicatively effective.

2.1.4. Vocabulary

The vocabulary aspect concerns the writer’s ability to select words that are appropriate, accurate, and effective within a specific context. As Heaton (1990) points out, a broad and well developed vocabulary enables writers to convey their thoughts more precisely, creatively, and with greater nuance. A rich vocabulary allows for variation in expression, helps avoid redundancy, and enables the writer to adjust tone and emphasis according to the communicative purpose of the text. Conversely, limited vocabulary often leads to vague or repetitive writing, which can reduce the clarity and overall impact of the message.

Harmer (2004) further explains that vocabulary choice not only reflects a writer’s linguistic competence but also demonstrates their awareness of style, tone, and audience expectation. The ability to choose the most fitting words shows sensitivity to meaning and context skills essential for producing writing that is both expressive and academically

appropriate. Poor or careless word choice can make writing sound monotonous, informal, or even misleading, thereby weakening the writer's intended meaning.

According to Nation (2001), there are three essential dimensions of vocabulary use: range, accuracy, and appropriacy. Range refers to the variety and richness of vocabulary that a writer employs to avoid repetition and add depth to their expression. Accuracy deals with the correct use of words in terms of meaning, spelling, and grammatical form, ensuring that language use is precise and unambiguous. Appropriacy, meanwhile, concerns the suitability of word choice based on the level of formality, topic, and audience, which is particularly important in academic contexts where objectivity and professionalism are valued.

In the context of academic writing, mastery of vocabulary signifies a writer's linguistic maturity and intellectual competence. The effective use of precise, formal, and discipline-specific vocabulary contributes to the clarity, coherence, and persuasiveness of the text. It also enables writers to construct arguments logically and present complex ideas in a sophisticated yet understandable manner.

In conclusion, vocabulary plays a vital role in shaping the clarity, tone, and overall communicative quality of writing. A writer with a strong command of vocabulary can articulate ideas more effectively, engage readers through stylistic variety, and produce writing that demonstrates both academic rigor and communicative excellence.

2.1.5. Mechanics

The *mechanics* element involves the technical conventions of writing, such as *spelling*, *punctuation*, and *capitalization*. Although often considered minor, mechanics are crucial because they directly affect readability and the professional appearance of a text. Brown (2004) points out that even small mistakes in punctuation or spelling can distort meaning and distract readers.

Heaton (1990) highlights that mechanics serve as the visual framework of writing, helping readers interpret sentences accurately. Proper punctuation (such as commas, periods, or quotation marks) guides the reader through the structure of a sentence, while consistent spelling and capitalization contribute to clarity and accuracy. Harmer (2004) further notes that

attention to mechanical details demonstrates a writer's discipline and care in producing well-crafted academic writing.

Thus, mechanics ensure that written communication is not only linguistically correct but also visually coherent, which enhances both readability and professionalism.

2.2 Paragraph

A paragraph is an essential unit of writing as it functions to convey an idea clearly, coherently, and structurally. According to Suladi (2019), a paragraph contains a main idea or central thought expressed through a topic sentence. In academic writing, the main idea does not only serve as the core of the discussion but also guides the writer in developing arguments systematically. The presence of a clear main idea helps the writer stay within a relevant scope of discussion so that the paragraph does not expand excessively or deviate from the context. For readers, the main idea becomes a key indicator to understand what the writer intends to convey, allowing the paragraph to be read more easily and the flow of ideas to be followed clearly.

In the process of composing a paragraph, its elements must be well understood to ensure that the paragraph develops coherently and meaningfully. According to Oshima and Hogue (2017), a well-constructed paragraph consists of three main components:

1. Topic Sentence

The topic sentence serves as the central idea that will be discussed in the paragraph. It contains the main point that becomes the focus, enabling the writer to develop explanations in a clear direction. The topic sentence is commonly placed at the beginning of a paragraph, although it may also appear in the middle or at the end depending on the writer's communicative purpose. An effective topic sentence must be clear, specific, and able to summarize the main idea without providing excessive details.

2. Supporting Sentences

Supporting sentences function to elaborate and expand the idea stated in the topic sentence. The development may include explanations, details, examples, illustrations, data, or relevant arguments. Effective supporting sentences should be

directly connected to the main idea and reinforce it, making the paragraph comprehensive, informative, and substantial. Without adequate supporting details, a paragraph may appear superficial or fail to demonstrate the writer's analytical ability.

3. **Concluding Sentence**

A concluding sentence reinforces the main idea or summarizes the discussion presented in the paragraph. It may also serve as a transition to the next paragraph to ensure continuity and unity of ideas in writing. A concluding sentence confirms the completion of the paragraph's discussion and provides clarity to the reader regarding the essential point of the exposition

4. **Cohesion**

Cohesion refers to the formal unity within a paragraph. This unity is reflected through the use of linguistic elements such as conjunctions, pronouns, or referential expressions that connect one sentence to another. Cohesion ensures that the sentences in a paragraph are grammatically integrated and do not appear fragmented.

5. **Coherence**

refers to the unity of meaning or logical relationship between ideas within a paragraph or text. Coherence allows the ideas in a paragraph to be organized clearly and systematically, making it easy for readers to follow. With coherence, a paragraph has a consistent flow of thought, enabling the message or argument to be fully understood by the reader.

These five components must be interconnected and organized so that the resulting paragraph is coherent, logical, and easy to understand. In line with this, Dalman (2014) states that paragraphs are not only judged based on the presence of their structural elements but also on their unity and coherence. Cohesion refers to the structural relationships among sentences marked by linguistic features such as conjunctions, reference, or key-word repetition. Meanwhile, coherence deals with the logical flow of meaning that enables the reader to follow the writer's ideas clearly without confusion. A paragraph is considered good when the sentences

within it support each other and flow logically, rather than standing independently or developing randomly.

In the context of academic writing, the effectiveness of a paragraph is not only determined by the completeness of its structural components but also by the writer's ability to manage ideas, maintain consistency of meaning, and logically connect sentences. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentence, cohesion, and coherence is essential for students developing their academic writing skills. The ability to construct effective paragraphs becomes the foundation for producing longer academic texts because each paragraph serves to introduce, develop, and reinforce arguments in an organized manner.

In relation to fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, the mastery of these paragraph elements still encounters several challenges in practice. Some students struggle to formulate a clear topic sentence, resulting in a weak representation of the main idea. In the development of supporting sentences, ideas are often not fully elaborated, and explanations tend to be general or lack depth. Concluding sentences are sometimes omitted or written repetitively, failing to reinforce the main point of the paragraph.

These issues indicate that paragraph writing skills require continuous practice and cannot solely rely on theoretical understanding. Hyland (2019) asserts that a well-written academic paragraph must pay attention to cohesion and coherence. Cohesion refers to the structural connectedness shown through linking words, references, or repetition of key terms, while coherence refers to the logical relationships between sentences that develop the idea meaningfully. Thus, a good paragraph is not only composed of structurally related sentences but also expresses ideas clearly and logically so that readers can easily comprehend it.

Field findings show that some students still find difficulties in maintaining logical relationships between sentences, resulting in paragraphs that appear fragmented or underdeveloped. Ideas are sometimes repetitive, unfocused, or not logically connected. This demonstrates that paragraph-writing proficiency must be continuously improved so that students

are able to produce academic writing with a clear and organized flow of thought in accordance with scholarly expectations.

Therefore, mastering paragraph writing skills involves not only the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences but also the ability to develop ideas logically, maintain consistency of meaning, and establish coherent relationships between sentences. Enhancing these abilities is an important step for students to produce paragraphs that are well-structured, clear, and capable of supporting the overall quality of academic writing.

2.3 Writing Barriers in Paragraph Writing

Writing English paragraphs is a complex skill because it involves linguistic, cognitive, technical, and affective aspects that interact simultaneously during the writing process. In EFL contexts, students often experience multiple difficulties when composing academic paragraphs, particularly in maintaining focus, organizing ideas, applying appropriate language forms, and managing the use of writing support tools. These challenges are frequently reflected in students' paragraph writing performance and are closely related to the difficulties explored through interview data in this study. The following sections describe the main areas of difficulty experienced by students in writing English paragraphs.

1. Difficulties in Constructing and Maintaining Paragraph Focus

Difficulties in constructing and maintaining paragraph focus are closely related to students' inability to unite ideas and consistently develop a single main idea within a paragraph. Many students struggle to express their ideas clearly and to maintain focus on the central topic throughout the paragraph. Linguistic barriers, such as limited academic vocabulary and inaccurate sentence construction, often cause students to shift topics unintentionally or present ideas that are loosely connected. Cognitive barriers also contribute to this difficulty, as students frequently experience problems in organizing ideas strategically and maintaining a clear flow of thought. As a result, paragraphs tend to appear unfocused, repetitive, or inconsistent, making it difficult for readers to identify the main idea being discussed.

2. Grammatical Difficulties in Paragraph Writing

Grammatical difficulties remain a prominent challenge in students' paragraph writing. These difficulties include errors in sentence structure, tense usage, subject–verb agreement, and the use of prepositions and articles. Al Fadda (2019) found that EFL students often struggle with grammatical accuracy, which results in sentences that do not meet academic writing standards. Weak grammatical mastery affects students' ability to construct clear and accurate sentences, leading to paragraphs that lack precision and clarity. In many cases, grammatical patterns from students' first language influence their English writing, further contributing to recurring errors. Such weaknesses reduce the effectiveness of paragraph development and interfere with the clear expression of ideas.

3. Vocabulary Limitations in Academic Paragraph Writing

Vocabulary limitation is another major difficulty faced by students when writing English paragraphs. Limited academic vocabulary restricts students' ability to express ideas precisely and appropriately. Students often rely on the same words repeatedly, struggle to choose suitable words, or use vocabulary that does not match the academic context. According to Hyland and Jiang (2017), the use of accurate and appropriate academic vocabulary is a fundamental component of academic writing quality. When students lack sufficient vocabulary knowledge, their paragraphs tend to be shallow, repetitive, and less effective in conveying meaning. This limitation also affects students' confidence in developing ideas more elaborately.

4. Difficulties in Paragraph Coherence and Cohesion

Difficulties related to coherence and cohesion frequently occur when students attempt to connect one sentence to another within a paragraph. Many students experience problems in establishing logical relationships between sentences and using appropriate cohesive devices such as conjunctions, pronouns, and transitional expressions. Cognitive weaknesses in organizing ideas often result in paragraphs that appear disjointed and lack a smooth flow of thought. When coherence is weak, readers struggle to follow the progression of ideas, even if individual sentences are grammatically correct. These issues indicate that students often focus on sentence-level accuracy without fully considering the unity and connectedness of ideas within a paragraph.

5. Difficulties in Developing Ideas

Students also experience difficulties in developing their main ideas into supporting sentences. Many paragraphs lack sufficient explanation, examples, or elaboration to support the central idea. According to Bitchener and Ferris (2018), weaknesses in organizing ideas and applying logical reasoning cause paragraphs to develop without clear direction. As a result, supporting sentences may appear irrelevant, insufficient, or loosely connected to the main idea. This difficulty leads to paragraphs that seem underdeveloped and fail to demonstrate students' analytical ability in academic writing.

6. Difficulties in Planning and Organizing Ideas

Planning and organizing ideas before writing present another challenge for students. Many students begin writing without clear planning strategies such as outlining or brainstorming, which affects the overall structure of their paragraphs. Cognitive barriers play a significant role in this difficulty, as students struggle to manage ideas systematically and maintain a coherent flow of thought. Without effective planning, paragraphs tend to lack organization, resulting in unclear main ideas and weak connections between sentences. This condition often causes students to lose focus during the writing process.

7. Affective and Cognitive Factors in Paragraph Writing

Affective and cognitive factors, such as low motivation, lack of confidence, and writing anxiety, significantly influence students' paragraph writing. Cheng (2017) states that writing anxiety directly affects students' ability to generate ideas and maintain writing focus. Students who experience anxiety often hesitate to develop ideas, fear making mistakes, and avoid presenting arguments in depth. These affective difficulties reduce students' mental readiness to start and complete writing tasks and frequently coexist with linguistic and cognitive challenges, thereby intensifying writing difficulties.

8. Use of Digital Technology in Paragraph Writing

Students commonly use digital technologies and applications such as Grammarly, QuillBot, and ChatGPT to support their paragraph writing process. These tools are mainly used to check grammar, rephrase sentences, and adjust language forms. According to Zhang and Hyland (2018), students who lack sufficient knowledge of writing-support tools may face difficulties in using them effectively. Although such technologies provide assistance in surface-level writing aspects, students often rely on them without fully understanding the underlying writing principles.

9. The Role of Digital Technology in Students' Writing Ability

The use of digital technology in paragraph writing does not fully address students' fundamental writing difficulties. A study by Andika, Sari, and Rahmawati (2025) shows that AI-based writing tools can reduce grammatical errors and help with sentence structure. However, students' difficulties in managing ideas, maintaining consistent arguments, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and developing paragraph depth remain unresolved. This condition indicates that digital tools cannot replace the critical thinking process required in academic paragraph writing.

10. Needs for Strengthening Academic Paragraph Writing Skills

Field observations reveal that despite access to various writing tools, difficulties in paragraph writing remain prevalent among students. Dependence on digital tools without understanding proper writing principles prevents paragraphs from developing optimally. Gunawan, Ahsani, and Putra (2025) emphasize that critical thinking skills play an essential role in academic paragraph writing performance. Therefore, independent writing strategies, idea-management skills, understanding paragraph structure, and mastery of academic vocabulary are necessary so that students can produce paragraphs that are grammatically accurate and academically sound. Understanding these barriers provides an important foundation for this study in analyzing students' academic paragraph writing skills and the factors that influence them.

2.4 Previous Studies

In this study, the review of previous research plays a crucial role in providing a solid foundation. Examining prior studies not only helps to identify relevant findings but also reveals gaps or limitations that warrant further investigation. Therefore, the following section presents several studies related to the topic under discussion, which may serve as an academic basis for developing this research.

1. The study conducted by Yupika Maryansyah and Zella Fransisca, entitled "An Analysis of Students' Barriers in Writing Essay at the Fifth Semester of English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu", focused on the barriers faced by fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program

at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu in the 2017/2018 academic year. This research aimed to describe the types of barriers experienced by students and to identify the most dominant obstacles in the academic writing process. The method employed was descriptive qualitative, involving 82 students as research subjects through questionnaires and interviews.

The findings revealed that students encountered various barriers in essay writing, including stress and difficulties in using grammar, vocabulary, and organizing the outline; first language (L1) interference that affected sentence structure and the use of tenses; lack of confidence in seeking clarification from lecturers; low expectations of the material and teaching methods; unclear task instructions; limited practice in critical thinking, which made it difficult to develop ideas; a lack of ideas due to minimal reading habits; as well as cultural background differences that influenced writing style

.Among these barriers, the study found that the most dominant factors were writing-related stress and first language interference, accounting for approximately 70%. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended that students strengthen their understanding of grammar, enrich their vocabulary, and practice critical thinking skills. Meanwhile, lecturers are expected to provide clearer instructions, create a more supportive learning environment, and encourage students to develop greater confidence in the writing process.

2. The study conducted by Evi Rusmita Dewi Ratna Sari, Arin Inayah, and Sutami, entitled “An Analysis of Students’ Difficulties in Writing Argumentative Essays at the Sixth Semester of English Educational Department in PGRI University of Banyuwangi”, aimed to analyze the difficulties faced by sixth-semester students of the English Education Department at PGRI University of Banyuwangi in writing argumentative essays. The research focused on cognitive difficulties as proposed by Byrne (1988) and their causes based on Graham and Harris’s theory in Glynn (2006). The research method employed was descriptive qualitative with a purposive sampling technique. The subjects of the study consisted of 12 students from the 2019 cohort, and the instrument used was a closed-ended questionnaire distributed online.

The findings indicated that students faced difficulties in five aspects of writing: punctuation, capitalization, spelling, organization, and content. Among these aspects, the most dominant difficulty was related to content, which reflected the students' weak ability to develop ideas, provide explanations, and support arguments with sufficient information or examples. Only 2 out of 12 students demonstrated good ability in this aspect, placing content in the "very poor" category (18.33%). Meanwhile, capitalization fell into the "good" category, punctuation into "fair," and both spelling and organization were categorized as "poor."

Furthermore, the study revealed that the main causes of students' difficulties were a lack of knowledge, effective strategies, and writing proficiency. Students were unable to manage strategies in writing, frequently made spelling and punctuation errors, and struggled to construct logical and structured arguments. Based on these findings, the researchers emphasized the need to strengthen writing knowledge, mastery of effective learning strategies, and the improvement of technical writing skills in order for students to produce better argumentative essays.

3. The study conducted by Nur Anisa Zakiah (2022), entitled "An Analysis of Essay Writing Difficulties Faced by the Third Semester Students in English Language Education of FKIP Universitas Islam Riau", aimed to identify the difficulties encountered by students in writing essays. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method involving 15 third-semester students as the sample, selected from a total of 101 respondents. Online questionnaires and interviews were used as research instruments to obtain more comprehensive data.

The findings revealed that students encountered various difficulties in essay writing, with the most dominant problems being in the areas of word choice and grammar. In addition, students also faced challenges in text organization, idea development, and writing mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Overall, the level of difficulty in essay writing was categorized as high, indicating that students' writing proficiency still requires serious attention.

This study also revealed that the main factors causing students' writing difficulties included a lack of motivation, limited knowledge of the stages of writing, insufficient practice, time constraints, and inadequate feedback from lecturers. These

findings provide important implications for English language teaching, namely the need for more effective learning strategies, increased writing practice, and the provision of constructive feedback so that students' writing skills can develop more effectively.

Based on the review of previous studies, it can be concluded that students' writing difficulties generally include linguistic aspects (grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation), cognitive aspects (idea development, text organization), and psychological aspects (stress, lack of self-confidence, learning motivation). Although prior research has examined writing barriers in various contexts, there remains room for further analysis, particularly regarding the influence of the digital era on students' writing ability. Therefore, this study seeks to extend similar investigations by focusing on paragraph-writing barriers among students in the digital era.